



# The Redstart

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB

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A paper entitled "An Experiment in Bird Study in West Virginia" was presented before the annual meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Club at Pittsburgh in December, 1934. It included a reference to the start of the Brooks Bird Club as one result of a public program of nature study which had been inaugurated in 1928 at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W. Va.

The present paper constitutes, in one sense, a progress report of the Brooks Bird Club. It foregoes, very largely, statistical information which might indicate progress, in favor of an effort to fix the reasons for such progress as has been made. It ventures to point out, by inference and example, how the Brooks club differs in certain respects from the average of the hundreds of local or state ornithological organizations of the nation.

In September, 1932, 14 young men and women formed the Brooks Bird Club in a meeting at Oglebay Park. The club was named for the late A. B. Brooks, of French Creek and Wheeling, resident naturalist at Oglebay Park and whose own enthusiasm for bird study motivated the club's organization.

During the 15 years which have followed that first meeting, the Brooks club has grown in various respects. It has carried out what might be termed the minimum requirements for an active group of amateur ornithologists. This is to say that it conducts monthly meetings, a regularly scheduled series of year-round field trips, assembles migration data, and conducts Christmas bird counts.

\*Ed. Note: This paper was presented at the 1947 meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Club, at Columbus, Ohio, on November 29. Mr. Handlan was unable to attend, so the paper was read by Elizabeth Etz.

The original 14 members have grown to 165 members in the club's classifications of honorary, active and corresponding membership. There exists an active chapter at Charleston with a four-year record of its own. There are concentrations of Brooks club members at Huntington and Morgantown, in West Virginia; at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and at Columbus, Ohio.

Until 1940 the Brooks club participated, individually and as a unit, in the Oglebay Park nature training schools which began in 1928. In 1940 the club began a week-long annual camping expedition of its own, and the eighth of these was completed in 1947.

From its inception, the club had a headquarters, but in 1940 the group achieved a club room of its own, and this remains the center of its activities. For example, the club publishes its own mimeographed monthly journal, THE REDSTART. Members of the club not only provide copy, edit it, and otherwise prepare it for publication, but cut the stencils, operate a mimeograph machine and mail the journal to its membership and its list of 17 exchanges. This work goes on during the "work nights" which occur at the club room every Tuesday, year in and year out. These "working nights" give an opportunity, also, to handle club correspondence and to publish an auxiliary journal, The Mailbag, which condenses correspondence for distribution to the club mailing list.

The Brooks club is one of the few in the nation, apparently, which has managed to work with organizations of hunters and anglers in its territory. Club members waste no time criticizing certain activities of so-called sportsmen's organizations. On the contrary, Brooks club members, notably at Wheeling and at Charleston, are members, too, of local sportsmen's groups and they attend meetings of the latter organizations. Naturally enough, this minority of ornithologists in these groups has been unable to effect any sweeping reforms. However, there certainly is a minimum of sportsmen's clubs' excesses in the areas to which reference has been made.

A major factor in this friendly relationship between sportsmen and ornithologists has been the Brooks club's cooperation with the Conservation Commission of West Virginia. The latter organization has, since 1940, included nearly a dozen members of the Brooks club. The Brooks club has been on especially friendly terms with the Division of State Parks, which has played host to six of the club's eight nature study forays, and with the Division of Game Management. In the latter organization, nearly a dozen keen, young technicians have availed themselves of the opportunity to join in the bird club's activities.

It is entirely possible that members of the Brooks club who have contributed materially to the knowledge of the state's avifauna might have done so without the background of the club. It is probable that many of these contributors would not have made contributions without the club's influence.

Two members of this organization discovered and took the two known specimens of Sutton's warbler. Members of the club have established and continue to study the breeding of Swainson's warbler in West Virginia. Two members of the club in 1947 established the state's first record for the breeding of the prothonotary warbler. Club members found the state's three first nestings of the purple finch during one of the annual forays. The club has

established or confirmed, nesting records of the mourning warbler, the hermit and olive-backed thrushes, the yellow-bellied sapsucker, the blue grosbeak, and other species.

This paper would be remiss if it did not express the gratitude of the Brooks club to individuals and organizations which have helped it to be a living organization. The late A. B. Brooks was the club's inspiration and early leader. The club's honorary members have been of inestimable value in the building of the group into a well-versed ornithological unit. These include Merit B. Skaggs, of Cleveland; Dr. Earl A. Brooks, of Newton Highlands, Massachusetts, who assisted materially in the club's early days; Dr. George M. Sutton, now at Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Maurice G. Brooks, of Morgantown, West Virginia; all of whom have been consistent friends and advisors of this organization. Past and present officers of the Wilson Ornithological Club and past and present members of the staff of the Carnegie Museum belong with this group of helpful and faithful friends of the Brooks Bird Club.

Charleston, W. Va.

NOTES ON THE WINTER BIRD AND MAMMAL LIFE  
OF BEAVERDAM RUN AND VICINITY

During the interval between February 5 and 16, 1948, there occurred an event which marked a milestone in Conservation in West Virginia. The period represented the first open trapping season on Beaver for many years. It resulted from efforts dating back to 1933 to restore this valuable fur species to the mountainous counties of the state. Since that time, the beaver have reached sufficient numbers to warrant an open trapping season in Tucker, Randolph and Pocahontas Counties.

In preparation for this re-opening of the beaver trapping season, a number of new laws and regulations were effected by the Conservation Commission, intended to prevent improper harvesting of beaver skins. Some of these were new to the field of fur management and were thus on more or less an experimental basis. In order to obtain first-hand information on the operation of the regulations the writer, accompanied by C. O. Handley, James Lindzey, and W. R. DeGarmo, set up and operated typical trapping units on Beaverdam Run, Laurel Fork of Cheat River, and Bennett's Run in Randolph County. The writer spent the period from February 6 through February 10 in this section.

The weather during the period was one of extremely severe winter conditions. The ground was covered with from 24 to 30 inches of snow which made travel all but impossible other than by snowshoes or skis. Low temperature ranging near zero each night over the previous two weeks had produced ice-covered streams in which there was practically no open water.

These conditions thus offered an opportunity for study of animal populations in extremely severe weather in an area of mixed spruce and northern hardwoods. The elevations ranged from 2900 feet along Laurel Fork of Cheat River to 3655 feet on one of the nearby mountain tops. The stands of young spruce were largely confined to the stream bottoms with the exception of small stands along some of the damp ravines. Where the stream bottoms were not filled with spruce, there was a dense stand of shrubby St.-John's-wort

Hypericum sp., and ninebark, Physocarpus opulifolius. Scattered along the streams were numerous beaver dams which were covered with snow and ice. Through the latter extended numerous dead trees in varied stages of decay. The deep snow and ice-covered streams tended to localize the movements of most of the mammals and birds. The following observations are brief notes on each species of mammal and bird noted in the area during the week:

#### MAMMALS

Raccoon, Procyon lotor. Due to the severe weather, no movements of raccoons were noted. Toward the end of the beaver trapping season when warmer weather and heavy rains removed most of the ice from the streams, one was found dead in one of the beaver traps.

Common Mink, Mustela vison mink. Mink are probably rather common in this area, even though we saw tracks of only two on Beaverdam Run during the week. Elsewhere on a tributary of Shavers Fork of Cheat River, mink were found to be much more common.

Red Fox, Vulpes f. fulva. Red foxes were abundant along the lower portion of Beaverdam Run and along Laurel Fork of Cheat River. Due to the crusted snow and frozen streams they were able to move about freely. This was particularly true of the ice-covered river where there was a great abundance of fox tracks of both this and the following species. It was of interest to note that practically all fox scats contained deer hair, an indication that deer were either dying of starvation, or that the foxes were feeding on remains of carcasses of deer which had died following the open hunting season. The writer inclined to believe the former to be the more likely circumstance.

Gray Fox, Urocyon c. cinereoargenteus. In spite of the high elevation of the area a number of gray fox tracks were noted. They were most numerous along Laurel Fork of Cheat River.

Bobcat, Lynx r. rufus. Bobcats were not particularly numerous. Tracks of one small bobcat which had crossed Beaverdam Run were seen.

Cloudland Red Squirrel, Tamiasciurus hudsonicus abieticola. Red squirrels were surprisingly scarce in the spruce groves. One individual was seen along Beaverdam Run and tracks were noted of two others. They did not appear to be as active as under more moderate temperatures.

Northern Beaver, Castor c. canadensis. The streams outlined above represent the location of some of the oldest stockings of beaver, dating as far back as 1933. A high beaver population near the headwaters of Beaverdam Run still occupied several series of dams. Here the beaver were confined to the ponds in which each lodge was situated. Trapping operations were thereby made much more difficult.

Common Muskrat, Ondatra z. zibethica. Recent studies of beaver colonies are revealing that occupancy of a stream by beaver has a profound effect on the distribution and abundance of other forms of animal life in the vicinity. This is particularly true of the muskrat. Throughout the length of Beaverdam Run, muskrats, though localized by the ice, were common. Several were trapped. Beaver dams soon produce an aquatic vegetation which offers increased feeding grounds for the muskrat as well as for mink and raccoon.

Virginia Varying Hare, Lepus americanus virginianus. Snowshoe hares were surprisingly common throughout the area, having made a rapid recovery from the low population of two years ago. There were snowshoe hare tracks seen as low as the mouth of Beaverdam Run. Tracks were also observed regularly between Lambert's Settlement and Beaverdam cabin. Here they were along the ridges which were covered almost entirely with northern hardwoods. Elsewhere, they appeared to prefer the bottomlands along Beaverdam Run.

Cottontail, Sylvilagus sp. Cottontails were likewise surprisingly common, particularly below the Middle Mountain Truck Trail, and along Laurel Fork of Cheat River. In a few spots tracks of both cottontails and hares were noted.

White-tailed Deer, Odocoileus virginianus - probably borealis. The deep and prolonged snows had so localized the movements of the deer that they were apparently approaching a condition as near yarding as occurs in West Virginia. Throughout the bottomlands and along Laurel Fork deer were concentrated. They apparently seldom left these areas and were accordingly consuming a large percentage of the available food supply, even feeding on such unpalatable species as spruce and hemlock. On one occasion a fawn deer was seen in an extremely weakened condition. It is doubtful if it survived. There were a few scattered reports of mortality in the same general area. It is at such times that the available winter food supply determines the carrying capacity of the range.

#### BIRDS

Birds were surprisingly scarce both in numbers and in variety of species. The following notes are of interest more for what was not found than for what was recorded:

Ruffed Grouse, Bonassa umbellus. During the week the writer saw only two grouse and tracks of two others. Several were seen by other members of our party. All were confined to the heavy cover along the streams.

Eastern Wild Turkey, Meleagris gallopavo silvestris. Resident wildlife manager, H. S. Rhodes, was feeding a flock of 13 wild turkeys near the head of Beaverdam Run. Two birds were seen on February 12, tracks of two birds which had crossed the Middle Mountain Truck Trail near the Beaverdam cabin were noted on February 9, and tracks of seven along Laurel Fork of Cheat River on February 11.

Northern Pileated Woodpecker, Hylatomus pileatus abieticola. One bird was heard on the ridge above Beaverdam Run on February 7.

Eastern Hairy Woodpecker, Dendrocopus v. villosus. Hairy and downy woodpeckers were the most common birds in the area. Both species were seen frequently, particularly, around the older beaver ponds where they frequented the dead trees which had been killed by flooding. Here is an example of benefit to a bird population from beaver occupancy. The same dead trees undoubtedly provide nesting sites during the summer months.

Northern Downy Woodpecker, Dendrocopos pubescens medianus. As common, if not more so, as the preceding species.

Northern Blue Jay, Cyanocitta cristata bromia. Scarce around the cabin area. Soon after some meat scraps were thrown out of the cabin, a blue jay appeared and remained near the cabin during the week, feeding on scraps placed on the snow for chickadees. The bird was not common.

Northern Raven, Corvus corax principalis. One or two ravens were heard from time to time around camp and along Bennett's Run. On February 5 while enroute to the trapping area, five ravens were seen in one group near Bowden along Shaver's Fork of Cheat River.

Eastern Crow, Corvus b. brachyrhynchos. Two crows were seen at the mouth of Bennett's Run on February 9. Elsewhere, several were seen near Gladys on February 5.

Black-capped Chickadee, Parus atricapillus. All the chickadees seen or heard were this species. An opportunity was thus available to study its notes and habits. Three birds frequented meat scraps placed outside the cabin. They were remarkably tame and appeared to seek our company, still perhaps in the search for food, while we were performing such chores as cutting wood. Their notes were typical and differed noticeably from those of the Carolina chickadee.

Brown Creeper, Certhia familiaris. Only two birds were seen during the week; both were in spruce stands.

Golden-crowned Kinglet, Regulus s. satrapa. Only two small flocks of not more than five birds each were seen. Once again, they were seen only in clumps of spruce.

Tree Sparrow, Spizella a. arborea. Several small flocks of tree sparrows were seen, and here and there, a single bird. It is interesting to note that this species represented the only sparrow found during the week. The tree sparrows appeared to be experiencing some difficulty finding suitable food. They were noted feeding on aster and shrubby St.-John's-wort.

Wendell Swank  
Elkins, West Virginia

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT  
Pittsburgh District

(City and suburbs, Frick Park, Riverview Park, Millvale, Mt. Lebanon, Emsworth, Forest Hills; deciduous wooded hillsides 40%, uncultivated fields 40%, lawns 20%). December 21, cloudy, temp. 30° to 40° F.; wind S W, 1-5 m.p.h.; ground bare. Eighty-four observers in 7 parties. Total hours, 31 (on foot); total miles, 34 (on foot).

Cooper's hawk, 3; sparrow hawk, 2; pheasant, 39; screech owl, 1; pileated woodpecker, 1; hairy woodpecker, 11; downy woodpecker, 52; black-capped chickadee, 53; tufted titmouse, 57; white-breasted nuthatch, 52; brown creeper, 7; winter wren, 3; golden-crowned kinglet, 4; starling, 256; English sparrow, 185; cardinal, 84; goldfinch, 9; towhee, 1; junco, 104; tree sparrow, 32; song sparrow, 25. Total species, 21. Approximately 981

individuals. Observers: Helen Blair, Carl Auerswald, Dorothy Auerswald, John Mehner, Margaret Martin, Russell Buehl, Galen Hess, Graham Netting, J. R. Lehman, Hal Harrison, Fred Kift, Mrs. J. Bruce Paterson, Mrs. Gordon Stuart, Elizabeth McClelland, Janet Dickson, Mrs. J. S. Brown, C. B. Shoemaker, Mrs. George Thorp, Floyd Eyler, and friends.

#### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

##### Deer Creek

(Allegheny County) Pennsylvania (Denny's Pond to Carson's, both sides of creek; Allegheny River, Hulton Bridge to upper end of Fourteen Mile Island, deciduous woodland 80%, open farmland 15%, marsh 5%). December 21. 8 A.M. to 2 P.M. Overcast; temp. 32° to 45°; wind W, 1-7 m.p.h.; ground bare; river partly covered with skim ice. Fourteen observers in 5 parties most of the time. Total hours, 28; total miles 23.

Black duck, 27; American golden-eye, 1; (adult male swimming down river, diving frequently; watched for 20 minutes, C.R.M. Jr. C.H.M.); ring-necked pheasant, 1; rock dove, 30; hairy woodpecker, 8; downy woodpecker, 23; crow, 2; black-capped chickadee, 29; tufted titmouse, 29; white-breasted nuthatch, 9; brown creeper, 2; winter wren, 1; Carolina wren, 4; golden-crowned kinglet, 16; starling, 201 (partly est.); English sparrow, 14; cardinal, 21; slate-colored junco, 145; tree sparrow, 25; song sparrow, 16. Total species 20; 604 individuals. Observers: Ray G. Russell, F. S. Bennett, C. R. Manley, J. Reed Longden, C. S. Taylor, John Sisley, Stanley Rapp, Ted Brown, Bob Armstrong, Gordon Michael, Bob Rapp, Jim Manley, C. R. Manley, Jr., C. H. Manley.

#### DUCKS AND GULLS AT CHARLESTON, W. VA.

In the period from January 31 to February 11, 1948, five species of ducks and one of gulls were seen in Charleston, West Virginia, on the Kanawha River at the mouth of the Elk River. In this week and a half period the Kanawha River was frozen only about 1/5 to 1/3 across at this junction of the two rivers. The birds were always found near the open edge of the ice. This was a cold winter all over the eastern United States, and the Charleston temperatures during this period averaged around 20° to 25° F. A total of six observations was made. All birds were observed for long periods and definite identity established. The following were seen:

Ring-necked Duck, Aythya collaris. Four birds were seen on two successive days.

Canvas-back, Aythya valisineria. These were seen on three successive days, and five were the most seen at any one time.

American Golden-eye, Glaucionetta clangula americana. One male and four females were usually seen on four of the trips.

Buffle-head, Glaucionetta albeola. One observation of two males was made.

American Merganser, Mergus merganser americanus. Two males of this species were seen on the first day only.

Herring Gull, Larus argentatus. These were seen on all the trips and varied in number from five on the first day to nineteen on the last day. On this last day all of them were sitting on one large piece of ice that had been caught on a snag about 25 yards off shore, and was the only ice remaining at this spot on the river. No ducks were present. The various stages from immature to adult plumage were seen.

In addition, a flock of from 15 to 20 horned larks, Eremophila alpestris, were seen feeding in the grass of the river bank on two occasions. They were probably prairie horned larks, but I was unable to determine the subspecies exactly.

Gordon C. Sauer, M.D.  
Charleston, W. Va.

#### FORAY BULLETIN

Plans for the Foray, for the week of June 12 to 20, are progressing in excellent fashion. Here are a few reminders which we hope you will read carefully, and keep in mind:

1. Bring your own towels, bed linen and blankets.
2. If you wish to ship luggage or boxes, express them to: c/o Brooks Bird Club, Durbin, West Virginia.
3. You may arrive at camp any time Saturday, June 12 - but no one will be admitted to quarters before registration at 2:00 P.M. on.
4. The Foray will operate on Eastern Standard Time.
5. The first official meal will be supper at 6:00 P.M.
6. The Camp Store will be well supplied with candy, peanuts, gum, cigarettes, nick-nacks, skeeter skoot, etc.
7. Don't forget - Girls' Campfire and Boys' Campfire.
8. Can anyone bring a barometer? Drop the Foray Director a card and he will contact you.
9. If you have any nature reference books that could be temporarily placed in the Camp Library, please bring them along.
10. If at all possible, please have your reservation in by June 1.
11. Get plenty of sleep - be prepared for anything - get set for a wonderful week.

Charles Conrad  
Foray Director