



The Redstart

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

Vol. III, No. 8

Edited by J. W. Handlan

May, 1936

SOME BREEDING BIRDS OF THE YOUNGSTOWN AND WHEELING REGIONS

A COMPARISON

by
Merit B. Skaggs

Wheeling, West Virginia, and Youngstown, Ohio, are less than 70 miles apart, by airline, yet the summer bird populations vary more than this distance would indicate. Some species which are common in one area, are rare or absent in the other area.

The writer observed bird life near Youngstown for a number of years and has visited the Wheeling region each year since 1930. Mr. Russell West, of Wheeling, very kindly supplied considerable data used in this paper in regard to breeding birds of the Wheeling area.

The following notes are presented in the hope that they may be of interest to bird students of the two regions. Of necessity, the annotations for each species are brief. Twenty-two species seem to vary considerably in regard to distribution and abundance so far as Wheeling and Youngstown regions, respectively, are concerned.

Centurus carolinus. Red-bellied Woodpecker. This species is rather common as a permanent resident in the Wheeling area. (? - Ed.) The writer's records in the Youngstown area are from points south of the city, where it is uncommon and local.

Cyanocitta cristata. Blue Jay. This bird presents a problem. Why is it so rare at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, when found, not uncommonly, in adjacent areas? A common permanent resident at Youngstown.

Penthestes atricapillus and P. carolinensis. Chickadees. Johnson (4) says the Black-capped Chickadee is common throughout the State and breeds in West Virginia. Birds moving southward into the Wheeling area in Winter are likely of this species (8). The Carolina Chickadee, also, is found in this area. Somewhat

more common than the Black-cap, its complete status is **still** unknown. The breeding bird at Youngstown is the Black-cap, although stragglers of the Carolina type (non-breeding) have been found north to the Lake (Erie) shore (3). Here is a field for study and research.

Thryomanes bewicki. Bewick's Wren. An uncommon summer resident, nesting locally, near Wheeling. There is but one record for Youngstown (7).

Thryothorus ludovicianus. Carolina Wren. A common, permanent resident near Wheeling. For several years, a few were found in Mill Creek Park, Youngstown, but, apparently, the cold of the last two winters was too much for them, as none has been seen lately.

Telmatodytes palustris. Long-billed Marsh Wren. A rare migrant near Wheeling. A specimen taken Sept. 11, 1931, was so badly in moult as to be unreferrable to race (8). At Youngstown, the species nests on the Mill Creek flats, race is undetermined.

Cistothorus stellaris. Short-billed Marsh Wren. No records for the West Virginia Northern Panhandle. The writer saw a pair carrying nesting material at a point just below the dam at the Belmont Hills Country Club, St. Clairsville, Ohio, in July, 1931. This species, also, nests on the Mill Creek flats at Youngstown. Its song is a great aid in finding the bird.

Mimus polyglottos. Rare at Youngstown, with more Winter than Summer records. Reported somewhat more frequently at Wheeling.

Polioptila caerulea. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. A common, nesting bird in the southern part of the Panhandle, less common in Hancock County (8). Uncommon at Youngstown, most often seen in May.

Vireo griseus. White-eyed Vireo. Very rare in migration, only, at Youngstown. Found not uncommonly to the south of Wheeling. The writer has several records for southern Belmont County, Ohio.

Mniotilta varia. Black and White Warbler. Breeds sparingly in the Panhandle. Found commonly in migration at Youngstown, but, apparently, does not nest there.

Helminthos vermivorus. Worm-eating Warbler. Found, not uncommonly, in the Ohio Valley north, at least, to Wellsville, Ohio. Seems common in the breeding season at Bird Hill, Marshall County, W. Va. Ernest Vickers, park naturalist at Mill Creek Park, Youngstown, has the only record for that area, made Sept. 25, 1913.

Oporornis formosus. This bird is common at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, and elsewhere in the vicinity but seems to be totally absent as a breeding bird at Youngstown, although there are May records. Columbia County, Ohio, seems a northern limit for the species as a common summer resident.

Icteria virens. Yellow-breasted Chat. This large Warbler is uncommon and local at Youngstown, but becomes more common as one goes southward.

Wilsonia citrina. Hooded Warbler. Interesting because of its inconsistent distribution. It nests rather commonly near Cleveland, not at all near Youngstown and is found, again, in the Ohio Valley from Wellsville, Ohio, south. The only Youngstown records are in migration time.

Dolichonyx oryzivorus. Bobolink. The wild, rollicking song of the Bobolink is everywhere in May and June over the fields and meadows of northern Ohio. To my ear, it is one of the most beautiful songs in all nature. Prof. Matheny, of Ohio University, Athens, says that U. S. Route 40 seems to be its southern limit across Ohio as a nesting bird. Found near Wheeling in migration, only, although it may nest in the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia.

Icterus spurius. Orchard Oriole. Rare at Youngstown, possibly nesting. In the Wheeling area it is extremely sporadic as a breeding bird, common in 1933, only (9).

Richmondia cardinalis. Cardinal. The beloved "redbird" seems to be somewhat more common at Wheeling than at Youngstown.

Passerina cyanea. Indigo Bunting. A common migrant and breeding bird near Wheeling, where it may be heard singing from dawn 'til dark over the entire countryside. Not so common at Youngstown.

Passerculus sandwichensis. Savannah Sparrow. Rare and local as a summer resident near Oglebay Park (5) and (6). Rather common in suitable habitat near Youngstown. Found commonly near the lakes in Fall.

Passerculus henslowi. Henslow's Sparrow. No records for the Northern Panhandle. The writer has one record for Belmont County, Ohio, in July, 1931. This bird is found in waste fields at Youngstown, where it is local in distribution.

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MAY MEETING

Victor Kehrer's paper on "Birds of Belmont County, Ohio", and a paper for which the title is to be announced, by Miss Paulinebelle Wyss will be read before the Brooks Bird Club at its regular monthly meeting on May 29, 1936. Completion of the 1936 Spring migration chart will be a feature, and members are urged to bring with them a list of "first dates" for migrant and summer resident species. The public is invited to attend this meeting, which will be held at the Oglebay Institute offices, starting at 8 p.m.

THE NINTH ANNUAL NATURE TRAINING SCHOOL

The West Virginia Nature Association's ninth annual Nature Training School will begin at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, on June 15, 1936. The school will continue in the Park for two weeks and then will be adjourned to Camp Woodbine, Nicholas County, W.Va. for an additional two weeks session.

Mr. A. B. Brooks, Oglebay Institute naturalist, is director of the Nature Training School, and calls particular attention to the opportunities for bird study afforded by this institution. Daily before-breakfast field trips are the rule during the month of intensive nature study and individuals particularly interested in birds will be coached and encouraged in individual work, in addition to regular lectures and field work scheduled in ornithology. Novices in bird study are grouped in a separate class. The mountain camping trip at Camp Woodbine, will introduce students to the avifauna of the Canadian life zone, well represented in the high mountains of West Virginia.

Mr. Brooks will be glad to send a folder descriptive of the school to anyone interested. He may be addressed at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W. Va.

It is of especial interest, also, that the National Association of Audubon Societies is establishing this year, in Maine, another outdoors nature training school, to be operated throughout most of the summer. Inquiries may be addressed to the N.A.A.S., 1775 Broadway, New York City.

Neither school offers college credits. Both offer opportunities for study of bird life under expert leadership, with a minimum of formality and a total lack of academic restrictions and qualifications. Work in both schools is almost entirely field work.

John Handlan

Wheeling, W.Va.

A Robin Blinded by Fused Eyelids. On May 5, 1936, Thomas John, of Washington, Pa., a student of Dr. A. M. Reese's class in zoology at West Virginia University, brought to Dr. Reese a young Robin, Turdus migratorius, which appeared to be blind.

Upon examination of the bird, the eyes appeared not to have been injured in any way, but, for some reason, the eyelids remained fused, preventing their opening. The bird was alive and appeared well excepting for its blinded condition. It was capable of short flights. John found the bird in a small hollow near the Morgantown city hospital.

Clyde B. Upton,
Morgantown, W.Va.

Bobolinks at Valley Grove, W.Va. Mr. Carl Coffield informs me that, on April 30, 1936, he noted two male Bobolinks, Dolichonyx oryzivorus, at the D. W. Coffield farm near Valley Grove, Ohio County, W. Va. He said that he and his sister, Miss Margery Coffield, as well as others of the family had seen others in the vicinity of the farm, as well.

The species is virtually unknown, even as a migrant, in this general area of the West Virginia Panhandle, but members of the Coffield family have noted scattered individuals and small flocks regularly for the past few years during the Spring migration period.

--John Handlan

Some Bird Notes for the West Virginia Panhandle. The following notes are submitted because of the scarcity, or absence, of records for the West Virginia Panhandle region.

Spatula clypeata. Shoveller. Alston Shields, of McMechen, saw a duck in a pond in Marshall County, West Virginia near Glendale, March 14, 1935. He was unable to identify it and called his cousin, Tom E. Shields, who reported it to be a Shoveller. A number of Brooks Bird Club members observed an individual of this species at close range in the Beech Bottom Swamp, Brooke County, West Virginia, March 20, 1935.

Nyroca collaris. Ring-necked Duck. A single male was observed by Tom Shields at Avalon, Ohio County, West Virginia, March 17, 1935 and two females were seen by the writer at the same place on March 23, 1935.

Larus philadelphia. Bonaparte's Gull. Victor Kehrer listed a number of Bonaparte's Gulls on the Ohio River near Martins Ferry, Ohio, on April 23, 1935 and George Flouer noted a number of birds of this species near Warwood, West Virginia on the same date. The writer found a single individual near Wheeling Island, in the Ohio, on April 25, 1935, feeding in company with a flock of Lesser Scaup Ducks.

Antrostomus v. vociferous. Eastern Whip-poor-will. A young example of this species was picked up by Tom E. Shields on Reymann's Hill, Ohio County, West Virginia, on July 13, 1930. The bird was alive, although in a dying condition, when it was found.

Vireo g. griseus. White-eyed Vireo. Tom Shields reported individuals of this species along Big Wheeling Creek, Marshall County, West Virginia, on July 4, 1935. This observer is well acquainted with the species, having encountered it in numbers in Pleasants County, West Virginia and Forsythe County, North Carolina, before the date of the Marshall County record.

-- Russell West,
Wheeling, W. Va.

EDITORIAL

Local Distribution. Mr. Merit B. Skaggs' article in this issue, comparing distribution of twenty two species of birds in the respective regions of Youngstown, Ohio and Wheeling, W. Va., raises once more the perennially interesting problems of local distribution. Even more remarkable than the variations he discusses in the two areas considered are more purely local variations in numbers of breeding species in the Wheeling area.

Why, for example, should American Redstarts and Kentucky Warblers be very common breeding species in certain local areas near Wheeling and totally absent, apparently, from immediately adjacent ones? To the eye of the layman the neglected areas have the same exposure, the same cover, the same vegetation, the same type of water supply and other environmental factors as those regularly used by the species under discussion.

Why should the Eastern Mockingbird winter in fair numbers in a very restricted territory at Lake Avalon, Ohio County, and be almost non-existent immediately beyond that territory as a wintering bird?

The strictly local distribution of certain other breeding or wintering species is strikingly evident in this part of the West Virginia Panhandle. The hill country is laced with small streams which travel steeply down through "coves" into a common depository stream. These "coves," almost side by side in numerous cases are strikingly alike, but in certain instances show isolated, sharply defined differences in their bird life.

The avifauna of a region certainly is not rigidly static with regard to abundance, or presence, of any species, and certain obvious factors may be in evidence to account for some of the radical changes noted. For example, the Acadian Flycatcher and the Louisiana Waterthrush once were common breeding birds of Oglebay Park, Wheeling, West Virginia. Heavily-patronized nature trails in the Park now follow the streams along which these species once were to be found commonly. The Acadian Flycatcher has apparently entirely disappeared from along these trails as a breeding bird and the Louisiana Waterthrush has appeared to be reduced in numbers in the same territory year by year until it now is uncommon there. Habitats of the same nature, outside the park still have their full quota of these two species. Persistent presence of man here seems to have had something to do with the diminished numbers of these two species.

There are two other factors, which appear as obvious, in the influencing of local bird distribution, but there are many more which do not appear on the surface and which, thus far, are utterly mysterious to the student of ornithology who experiences their consequences afield.

Greetings from Iowa. Mrs. C. T. McKenzie, of Fairfield, Iowa, vice president of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, recently visited Oglebay Park, Wheeling, where the Editor had the pleasure of a call from Mrs. McKenzie and two of her friends. She appeared much interested in a discussion of West Virginia's bird life and cordially urged that members of The Brooks Bird Club visit Iowa and meet the birds and ornithologists of that state.

The Redstart is distributed, free, to all members of The Brooks Bird Club.

Dues of Active Members (elected to membership) are \$1.00 a year. Dues of Corresponding Members (membership upon application) are 50 cents a year.

Officers of the club are:

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