



The Redstart

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

Vol. VI, No. 10

Edited by J. W. Handlan

July, 1939

ORNITHOLOGICAL NOTES FROM THE 1939 NATURE SCHOOL CAMP AT TERRA ALTA

by
William A. Lunk

In 1939, as in preceding years, the general interest in ornithology during the camp of the Nature Leaders Training School at Terra Alta, W. Va., was quickened by a contest. In this, several groups competed in listing birds recorded during the two weeks of the camp, and in the finding of occupied nests.

It was agreed to include only observations made near Terra Alta or on organized field trips. The first and longest of these trips included, in two days, visits to Greenland Gap, Lost River State Park, the Smoke Hole, Spruce Knob and other points of interest. At other times, Swallow Falls, Cranesville Swamp, Hull's Hunting and Fishing Camp and territory near Brookside were visited. At all of these points interesting discoveries were made and these are included in the accompanying list.

The total camp list for 1939 is 113 species, as compared to 119 in 1938 and 120 in 1937. In spite of the evident gaps in this year's list, many interesting finds were made and four species were added to the 1937-38 combined list.

A total of 138 occupied nests were recorded, representing 27 species and these figures show a considerable decline from those of the two preceding seasons. Of particular interest, perhaps, were nests of a Hummingbird and of a Scarlet Tanager, both of which were located near the road not far from camp. Three nests of the Canada Warbler were found, one at Swallow Falls and two at Lake Terra Alta, the three being found on three successive days.

Following is the complete list compiled from the records of the group leaders. As in previous, similar reports, figures in parentheses refer to the number of nests recorded for the species so marked:

Pied-billed Grebe	House Wren (17)
Green Heron	Bewick's Wren
Mallard	Carolina Wren
Turkey Vulture	Mockingbird
Cooper's Hawk	Catbird (6)
Red-tailed Hawk	Brown Thrasher (3)
Red-shouldered Hawk	Robin (5)
Broad-winged Hawk	Wood Thrush (4)
Marsh Hawk	Hermit Thrush
Sparrow Hawk	Olive-backed Thrush
Ruffed Grouse	Veery (2)
Bob-white	Bluebird
Killdeer	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Woodcock	Cedar Waxwing (1)
Spotted Sandpiper	Migrant Shrike
Solitary Sandpiper	Starling (3)
Mourning Dove	Blue-headed Vireo (2)
Black-billed Cuckoo	Red-eyed Vireo (2)
Screech Owl	Black and White Warbler
Great-horned Owl	Golden-winged Warbler
Barred Owl	Parula Warbler
Whip-poor-will	Yellow Warbler
Nighthawk	Magnolia Warbler
Chimney Swift	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Ruby-throated Hummingbird (1)	Black-throated Green Warbler
Belted Kingfisher	Cerulean Warbler
Flicker (1)	Blackburnian Warbler
Pileated Woodpecker	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Red-headed Woodpecker	Pine Warbler
Hairy Woodpecker	Prairie Warbler
Downy Woodpecker (2)	Oven-bird
Kingbird	Louisiana Water-thrush
Crested Flycatcher	Kentucky Warbler
Phoebe (11)	Yellowthroat
Least Flycatcher	Yellow-breasted Chat
Acadian Flycatcher (1)	Hooded Warbler
Alder Flycatcher	Canada Warbler (3)
Wood Pewee	Redstart
Prairie Horned Lark	House Sparrow (4)
Bank Swallow	Bobolink
Rough-winged Swallow	Meadowlark
Barn Swallow (4)	Red-wing
Cliff Swallow (51)	Orchard Oriole
Purple Martin	Baltimore Oriole
Blue Jay	Grackle
Raven	Cowbird
Crow	Scarlet Tanager (1)
Black-capped Chickadee	Cardinal (2)
Carolina Chickadee	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Tufted Titmouse	Indigo Bunting
White-breasted Nuthatch	Goldfinch

Towhee (1)
Savannah Sparrow
Grasshopper Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Henslow's Sparrow

Carolina Junco
Chipping Sparrow (5)
Field Sparrow (3)
Swamp Sparrow (1)
Song Sparrow (1)

Fairmont
West Virginia

CHANGES IN CERTAIN BIRD POPULATIONS

by
John W. Handlan

Mr. William A. Lunk's paper in this issue of THE REDSTART is particularly interesting to those of us whose ornithological bookkeeping for the Terra Alta region extends back through a decade to the time of the first mountain camp of the Nature Training School in 1929.

The writer recalls vividly his experiences when he first encountered West Virginia's mountain bird population -- this at the time of the 1929 camp at Terra Alta. Backed by records made at the time, these experiences and sensations remain as clear in his mind as though they had occurred yesterday instead of ten years ago.

Camp had been pitched in the Scott woodland, part of which now is under lease to the West Virginia Nature Association. Robert B. Hudson, camp manager, George Vaucher, chef, and E. G. Hickman and Clyde Upton, volunteer helpers, were waiting for the main party when we reached the site by automobile in the late afternoon of June 27, 1929. As I carried a load of hand luggage from my car to the tent sites an Oven-bird sang from the nearby woodlands and the call note of a Veery came from ever closer at hand. The baggage was dropped -- to the imminent danger of my feet! -- and was not picked up again until Mr. A. B. Brooks, just ahead of me on the pathway, had identified for me those "new birds."

From all sides came the songs of the Least Flycatcher and as dusk came on we interrupted our camp work to listen to the fine Veery chorus which most of us always will associate with Terra Alta. Next morning the prominent bird song in the chorus was that performed by Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. The 1939 list, as presented by Mr. Lunk is far greater in numbers and, doubtless, in number of individuals recorded than is my own list of species for 1929.

Moving ahead to 1932, when the Nature group again visited Terra Alta, my notes show that Least Flycatchers again were particularly common and that two nests were found close to camp. From those same notes, also: --"The Grosbeaks (Rose-breasted Grosbeaks) were numerous in trees bordering the roadway from camp to the foot of the lake. Three nesting pairs (we located the nests) came close to us in response to 'hand-squeaks.'"

It is to be noted that in Mr. Lunk's compilation no nests of the Least Flycatcher or of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak are to be found listed. On the other hand, two nests of the Cardinal are noted in the 1939 list and in the writer's records for 1929 and 1932 not a single record for the Cardinal is recorded. In brief it seemed that the Rose-breasted Grosbeak almost entirely replaced the Cardinal at the comparatively high elevation of the Terra Alta region and the Least Flycatcher seemed, in some degree, to replace the Phoebe which surely is more common now than it is listed for

1929 and 1932.

Perhaps most noticeable of the changes which ten years have wrought in the bird life at Terra Alta is the seemingly great increase in the numbers of Catbirds and Robins during the past ten years. These omnipresent species were, of course, represented at Terra Alta both in 1929 and in 1932. The writer's records, however, comment on the comparative scarcity of these birds in the general vicinity of the camp area. There is a note which reads: - "During our visit to Cranesville we noticed, particularly, that the few Robins we saw were as wild and wary as any shy, woodland bird. On the other hand the Veery, which our books tell us is one of the shyest of wild birds, actually hopped about near the mess tables and fed on crumbs like any city sparrow."

Briefly, there seems to be a definite trend toward an increase in the more common, friendly-to-man species at Terra Alta, and a corresponding decrease in numbers of birds not normally associated in close proximity to man. There has been little change at Terra Alta in ten years so far as human intrusion is concerned. Actually, part of the former agricultural land bordering the lake itself now has been taken over in the Nature Association lease and tentative plans call for a "managed" area so far as providing food and cover for wildlife is concerned. The nearby mountains still are clothed in second-growth timber and brushy borders of old pasture lands still afford "islands" for food and cover for birds other than the deep forest types.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that there has been a gradual change in certain bird populations at Terra Alta. This writer declines to guess at any answer to the question presented by these changed conditions. The Veery still sings his evening and morning song in a great chorus. The Whip-poor-wills loudly announce their presence in the area. Ovenbirds call from the wooded slopes as they did before. The Northern wood warblers remain in possession of certain habitats in the vicinity of the camp and the swampy margins of the lake continue to reveal new and interesting records of bird life. But the Least Flycatchers and the Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have sharply diminished in numbers and Catbirds, Robins and, among other species, have materially increased their representation in the area.

91 Lynwood Avenue
Wheeling, W. Va.

EDITORIAL NOTES

A Case Close at Hand:— Apropos the foregoing and inadequate discussion of changing bird populations at Terra Alta is a case much closer at hand for the majority of the active members of The Brooks Bird Club. This is the changed environment for bird-life being brought about by Oglebay Park in Ohio County, West Virginia.

At the meeting of The Brooks Bird Club in February, 1936, a paper by Mr. Russell West called attention to the changed environment being rapidly effected at Oglebay Park because of its speedy development as an urban center for physical recreation. Uprooting of large hedge-rows, persistent mowing of unused, former pasture fields, ruthless cutting out of woodland undergrowth to create picnic areas -- these things all entered into the situation which was the source of frequent comment in meetings of the Bird Club.

These man-made improvements (and "improvements" they are if one is to think from the standpoint of the vast majority of people who want physical recreation facilities rather than a beautiful, natural park) since have continued apace. Former old pasture fields now are closely clipped golf fairways -- part of the "second nine." Dead or dying trees are consistently removed to provide firewood and as a precaution against possible injury to visitors should the trees or heavy limbs of the trees fall. Cabins for vacationers usurp an erstwhile fine woods border area. A highly developed and developing organized camp unit perches on the very edge of two of the Park's best known and finest nature trails. During the Summer of 1939 the writer, serving as instructor in field bird study for the 12th annual Nature Leaders Training School, took his class once -- and once only -- to the Waddell's Run area in the Park along the Thoreau Trail. The Run for most of its length in the Park was an open sewer.

Be it understood that the writer fully understands that these "improvements" are of far more interest and value to Mr. John Average Citizen than the things of which they have deprived a limited number of us. It is to be doubted, for example, if the average picnicker at Oglebay Park knows or cares anything about habitats for wildlife and that, if he did, he would give a tinker's damn about destruction of wildlife areas to provide "recreation facilities."

Certain it is that diminution of various types of bird life in Oglebay Park has occurred and continues to occur. Field notes for trips made in the Park since 1928 reveal unmistakably that certain species, once fairly common in the Park, now are of rare occurrence there.

For example, the Acadian Flycatcher once greeted visitors at virtually every turn along the Brooks Trail. The species still occurs in the Park, but very sparingly, and during one of the past three seasons was absent from the writer's records entirely excepting in the Spring migration period.

How long has it been since records of field trips in the Park have included such notations as these, taken from personal notes made in June 1933 and June 1934, respectively: "Sparrow Hawk -- Three pairs," and "Sparrow Hawk -- Two pairs and two male birds?"

The bitter winter of 1935-36 may have winter-killed part of the Park's Carolina Wren population, but certain it is that deserted territories of this species have not since been taken over by other Carolina Wrens. This fine Wren still occurs in the Park, of course, but sparingly, only, where it once was a common permanent resident species. Records of Winter field trips of several years ago are consistent in listing up to a half-dozen Winter Wrens in the Park. As matters now stand, the thorough combing which the Christmas bird census takers give the Park barely suffices to put the species on the Christmas list.

Changes in the Park's bird population have not been altogether on the debit side of the ornithological ledger, so far as number of species is concerned. In the Winter of 1937-38, a few Blue Jays were noted in the Park for the first time in some ten years and in numbers. Occasional wintering Mockingbirds also have taken to visiting the city recreation area.

Changes brought about by human intrusion into wildlife habitats and the destruction of many of these habitats to make way for recreation facilities seem definitely to have brought about the changes in the Park's bird life of the last decade. It is to

be noted that there is an increasing tendency on the part of experienced field students of birds to direct their attention elsewhere than to Oglebay Park. Part of this reaction is definitely brought about by the growing scarcity there of virtually all those birds not accustomed by many generations of familiarity to associate with man. Part of it is the fact that most of these outdoors enthusiasts must carry on their hobbies on a Saturday-afternoon-and-Sunday basis. This particular period, during the Summer months at least, regularly finds the Park literally swamped by golfers, swimmers, picnickers, tennis players, etc. Scant wonder that interest in the Park by outdoors people is fading so rapidly!

It is to be repeated here that some nine of every ten people who visit the Park for any reason approve of matters as they stand. There is nothing the minority can do about it. There should always be room in Oglebay Park for such nature study as public field trips which, after all, are designed to be inspirational rather than purely informational, and properly so. Those of us who prefer nature study undiluted by radio music, swing bands, remains of picnic lunches and crowd noises are privileged to find this undiluted product elsewhere.

-- J.W.H.