



# The Redstart

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

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Vol. VI, No. 5

Edited by J.W. Handlan

February, 1939

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## A DECEMBER DAY IN THE WEST VIRGINIA SPRUCE BELT

by  
Maurice G. Brooks

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As many readers of THE REDSTART know, that part of the Cheat mountains area which surrounds Cheat Bridge, in Randolph County, West Virginia, is a region of never-failing outdoor interest. Most of our visits there have been made during the Summer months, but the other three seasons have their own charms, each in a different way. For a long time I have wondered what birds would be found spending the Winter in such an "Arctic" region, and a recent trip has shed some light on the matter.

In THE REDSTART, Ruth Brooks has described a short, previous visit to the Cheat Bridge area, but on December 20, 1938, I. B. Boggs and the writer spent an entire day in the making of a Christmas Bird Census in the Cheat Bridge environs.

Visits were made to the fire towers at Barton's Knob and Gaudineer Knob, to White Top and Cromer Top, and to Cheat Bridge Settlement. We were afoot for about eight miles, the car being utilized as little as possible. Stinging cold (4 degrees below zero F.) met us on arrival at Cheat River, but the ground had little snow and the temperature became much warmer later in the day. Wind was not bothersome, even on the peaks. It was the second time I have visited Barton's Knob in December when there was little or no wind.

As to the birds, they were few and far between. During the entire day we listed only 76 individuals of ten species, despite the fact that we searched intensively. In a region of such abundant summer bird life, it was strange to travel for miles without seeing or hearing a single bird. Most common, by far, were the Black-capped Chickadees and the Golden-crowned Kinglets. Grouse were present in good numbers, as were Brown Creepers. We noted a few Downy Woodpeckers; saw one and heard another Barred Owl; found two Juncos feeding near a corn crib at Cheat Bridge; and recorded single individuals of Hairy Woodpecker, Winter Wren and Blue Jay.

Summer visitors to Barton's Knob with its magnificent young Spruces, will recall that Golden-crowned Kinglets, Black-capped Chickadees, Brown Creepers, Ruffed Grouse and Juncos are, perhaps, the most characteristic breeding birds. It interested us exceedingly that here, in winter, at 4,400 feet above the sea, are to be found commonly the same birds, all save the Juncos. For these species Winter food is apparently not a problem; they are able to survive whatever may come. Of course it does not follow that breeding and wintering individuals are identical, but at least the species are represented.

The wide "top" where Gaudineer Tower stands is clothed with an almost impenetrable growth of young spruces and mountain laurel, seemingly a sterile place for animal life. Yet we followed here the tracks of two Grouse which had fed in the shadow of the tower, the birds having taken gravel from the walkways which have been constructed. Snowshoe Hares and cottontails had run close by, and a weasel had followed the trails.

Grandfather Cromer, ever a source of information, told us that birds had been scarce locally, a thing we could well believe. Ravens, he said, were present wherever the carcasses of deer, killed illegally, had been left. We were shown his magnificent mounted Golden Eagle, killed locally and surely one of the finest birds of its kind ever preserved in the state. He told of periodic fluctuations in the Snowshoe Hare population (a matter on which we have little West Virginia information), and of tracking (during the winter of 1937) two panthers which crossed the Cheat River, sat for a time on a rock just above the balsam fir swamp on the Southeast side of the river, and finally crossed over to the waters of the Greenbrier.

The coldest weather in his experience, he said, came in March, 1936, when the thermometer dropped to 41 degrees below zero. Pet Gray Squirrels, kept in a warm nesting box were found frozen to death when he went to feed them.

Despite the scarcity of birds there were compensations, the slanting rays of winter suns cast different shadows among the Spruces, creating a cathedral-like effect that is not found in summer. No person who has not seen the frost and ice crystals on the spruce needles can imagine their delicacy and beauty. The Spruce Belt is genuinely Canadian when winter comes!

Division of Forestry  
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## SOME REPORTS FROM BIRD-LORE'S CHRISTMAS CENSUS

Report of Bird-Lore's thirty-ninth Christmas Bird Census appeared this year, for the first time, as a supplement to the January-February issue of the magazine. A few of the numerous census reports which occur in the supplement are here reproduced as being of especial interest to readers of THE REDSTART. Data as to wind, weather, division of observers, etc. is here omitted, as this precise information may be secured by anyone interested in the Bird-Lore census supplement.

Linesville, Pa. (Pymatuning Sanctuary) - Canada Goose, 8; Mallard, 69; Black Duck, 4; Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1; Red-tailed Hawk, 4; Sparrow Hawk, 4; Ruffed Grouse, 3; Bob-white, 10; Coot, 4; Great-horned Owl, 1; Pileated Woodpecker, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 3; Downy Woodpecker, 5; Blue Jay, 2; Black-capped Chickadee, 35; Tufted Titmouse, 1; White-breasted Nuthatch, 2; Winter Wren, 1; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 1; English Sparrow, 6; Cardinal, 1; Slate-colored Junco, 4; Tree Sparrow, 6. Total 23 species, 172 individuals -- Frank A. Hegner.

Pittsburgh, Pa. (Emsworth, River Hill, Frick Park, Wilksburg, McKeesport, Duquesne, Dravosburg and Cheeseman, Washington Co.) Cooper's Hawk, 1; Sparrow Hawk, 1; Ring-necked Pheasant, 15; Hairy Woodpecker, 10; Downy Woodpecker, 43; Horned Lark, 1; Crow, 3; Chickadee, 93; Tufted Titmouse, 49; White-breasted Nuthatch, 31; Winter Wren, 4; Carolina Wren, 3; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 4; Cedar Waxwing, 4; Starling, 296; English Sparrow, 693; Cardinal, 182; Goldfinch, 15; Slate-colored Junco, 136; Tree Sparrow, 70; Song Sparrow, 108. Total, 21 species, 1762 individuals. Robins and Flickers seen through December. Bob-white only in city parks. --- Mr. and Mrs. Alex Hardie, John Dravish, C. B. Shoemaker, L. F. Savage, Paul Savage, Margaret Savage, Thomas Ulerich, William Schwerin, Ethel Weston, Mary A. McBride, William Grimm, Elizabeth Bechman, Helen Blair.

Cadiz, Ohio - Cooper's Hawk, 1; Red-tailed Hawk, 5; Sparrow Hawk, 6; Wilson's Snipe, 1; Flicker, 2; Red-bellied Woodpecker, 2; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 2; Downy Woodpecker, 8; Black-capped Chickadee, 24; Tufted Titmouse, 15; White-breasted Nuthatch, 12; Carolina Wren, 3; Mockingbird, 1; Starling, 25; English Sparrow, 47; Red wing, 2; Cardinal, 22; Slate-colored Junco, 3; Tree Sparrow, 36; Song Sparrow, 5. Total, 21 species, 223 individuals -- H. B. McConnell, John G. Worley, John and David Worley, Raymond Reed, Robert Patterson, Milton McC. Ronsheim.

French Creek, W. Va. - Red-tailed Hawk, 1; Ruffed Grouse, 4; Bob-white, 12 (one covey); Barred Owl, 1; Flicker, 2; Pileated Woodpecker, 4; Red-bellied Woodpecker, 4; Red-headed Woodpecker, 2; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 2; Hairy Woodpecker, 4; Downy Woodpecker, 18; Horned Lark, 5; Crow, 2; Chickadee, 26; Tufted Titmouse, 57; White-breasted Nuthatch, 17; Brown Creeper, 2; Winter Wren, 4; Carolina Wren, 16; Hermit Thrush, 2; Bluebird, 11; Golden-crowned

Kinglet, 14; Cedar Waxwing, 8; English Sparrow, 163 plus; Cardinal 41; Goldfinch, 1; Slate-colored Junco, 145; Tree Sparrow, 147; Swamp Sparrow, 1; Song Sparrow, 14; Total 30 species 730 plus individuals -- Dorothy Brooks, Ruth Brooks, Maurice Brooks.

Morgantown, W. Va. (Vicinity of Morgantown to Lake Lynn) - Mallard, 12; Black Duck, 301; Wood Duck, 2; Canvasback, 1; Scaup (Sp.?) 23; Bufflehead, 2; Ruddy Duck, 2; Hooded Merganser, 9; Red-breasted Merganser, 2; American Merganser, 5; (unusually heavy, late Duck flight for this mountain lake.) Bonaparte's Gull, 1; Pileated Woodpecker, 1; Red-bellied Woodpecker, 3; Hairy Woodpecker, 4; Downy Woodpecker, 11; Blue Jay, 17; Crow, 11; Chickadee, 8; Tufted Titmouse, 36; White-breasted Nuthatch, 8; Winter Wren, 2; Carolina Wren, 7; Brown Thrasher (first winter record for the territory; bird has been under observation for a month), 1; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 2; Starling, 2; English Sparrow, 48; Cardinal, 29; Goldfinch, 4; Slate-colored Junco, 69; Tree Sparrow, 134; Song Sparrow, 16; Total, 31 species, 773 individuals. -- A.S. Margolin.

Wheeling, W. Va. (Oglebay Park - 750-acre territory) - Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1; Ring-necked Pheasant, 8; Downy Woodpecker, 18; Blue Jay, 1; Crow, 200; Chickadee, 91; Tufted Titmouse, 30; White-breasted Nuthatch, 8; Brown Creeper, 1; Winter Wren, 2; Carolina Wren, 2; Bluebird, 1; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 19; Starling, 23; English Sparrow, 27; Cardinal, 26; Goldfinch, 1; Slate-colored Junco, 48; Tree Sparrow, 4; Song Sparrow, 8; Total, 20 species, 519 individuals. -- A. B. Brooks, S. A. Rybeck, Arthur Rybeck, Walter Rybeck, J. W. Handlan, Dorothy Conrad, Clyde Upton, Beth Ann Waddell, Walter Ammon, Mabel Hopwood, Dorothy Reynolds, Nancy Caldabaugh, Jim Burton, Bill Burton, John Todd, Ed Dowler, John Pattison, Harold Olsen, Harold Bergner, members of Brooks Bird Club.

Editor's Note: The Brooks Bird Club group missed such species as Red-bellied Woodpecker (an individual has regularly fed at a feeder in the Park); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (noted frequently at feeder in residence adjacent to Park; Mockingbird (at least one individual is wintering at an estate adjoining the Park); Horned Lark (numerous examples noted during Winter in and near the Park) and a few others. The census was chiefly taken during a furious downpour of cold rain which, combined with melting snow, made the steep, woodland trails of the census area virtually impassable. - J.W.H.

#### FOUR-YEAR REDSTART INDEX NOW AVAILABLE

A mimeographed index to the first four volumes of THE REDSTART now is available upon application of any members of the Brooks Bird Club or other interested individuals. The index consists of 23 pages and involves a mailing expenditure beyond the means of the Brooks Bird Club, so far as general distribution to members is concerned. However, any member of the club may secure a copy of the index by requesting it. The task of preparing an index for Volume V and for Vol. VI probably will not be completed until the conclusion of the present Volume (VI). An editorial reference in this issue also refers to the completed four-year index.

## THE ORNITHOLOGICAL JOURNALS

Auk, The, Vol. 55, No. 4, October, 1938. - Karl Haller's "Notes from West Virginia," will be of particular interest to members of The Brooks Bird Club. He collected an example of the Wilson's Snipe, Capella delicata, on July 13, 1937, in Canaan Valley, Tucker County. The bird was a juvenile male which, combined with information supplied by the farmer on whose land it was taken, would tend to establish the Wilson's Snipe as a breeding species. Two Western Sandpipers, Ereunetes maurii, were taken at Leetown in Jefferson County to establish previous sight records by Lloyd Poland. Five specimens of the Longbilled Marsh Wren, taken in Brooke County and in Preston County during fall all proved to be examples of Telmatodytes palustris palustris. A Mason County example of Shrike, Lanius ludovicianus, taken in March, 1937, has left the collector in doubt as to the race of the bird, which approaches both L.l. migrans and L.l. ludovicianus in certain respects. Seven examples of Dendroica palmarum taken in the fall of 1937 all proved to be typical D.d. palmarum, the Western Palm Warbler. Three were from Ohio County and four from Mason County, W. Va. Two specimens of Grinnell's Water-thrush, Seiurus noveboracensis notabilis (the sub-specific name appears in the AUK as notabilis rather than grinelli - Ed.) were taken in Brooke County and appear to be the first and only specimens taken in the state.

To quote the concluding paragraphs of Mr. Haller's notes:

"Red-winged Blackbird, Agelaius phoeniceus. Dr. Alexander Wetmore in his recent paper ('Observations on the birds of West Virginia,' Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus., 84: 401-441, 1937) lists the collecting of a giant Red-wing, A.p. arctolegus, near Enon, Nicholas County, May 11, 1936. This was the first record of this larger form for the State.

"I secured eight Red-wings, two males and six females, from a flock of about three hundred on the Knight Farm, near Lakin, Mason County, on December 30, 1936. On comparing these specimens with skins in the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the two males and four females were determined as A.p. arctolegus. The other two females were assigned to the common eastern form, A.p. phoeniceus. Identifications were made by Miss Ruth Trimble, of the Carnegie Museum staff and myself. These identifications were checked by Dr. H. C. Oberholzer of the U. S. Biological Survey."

The current issue includes a review of Dr. Earle A. Brooks' West Virginia ornithological bibliography, previously reviewed in THE REDSTART.

E. A. McIlhenny writes of "Florida Crane a Resident of Mississippi," and Malcolm Davis notes the "Psrtial Nidification of the Flightless Cormorant," (captive birds). The remainder of the longer articles are of more or less technical nature. -- J.W.H.

Bird-Lore, Vol. XLI, No. 1, January-February, 1939.- Frank M. Chapman's "Memories of Louis Fuertes," seconds numerous other "records" by this author in noting the love and esteem in which a great painter and ornithologist was held by a great author-ornithologist. Recommended to all amateurs is Part II of R. T. Peterson's "Water and the Earth," and Part II of "Why Do Birds Behave as They Do," by N. Timmergen, of the University of Leyden. In the latter article certain ingenious experiments suggest checking or improvement by anyone interested in confirming bird-behavior results recorded by the author.

Inclusion of the Bird Census reports in a separate supplement results in retention in this issue of the usual fine departments. The President's Page makes note of certain activities designed to perpetuate such fine species as the Everglades Kite, the Glossy Ibis and the Limpkin. It seems to this reviewer that we, as a Club, need to assist in the compilation of "The Region," a regularly absorbing record of the presence of birds in general areas of the United States. West Virginia's peculiar conditions, geographically and zoogeographically, so far as we know them, seems to merit especial attention in this respect and -- it would seem to be "up to us" to do something about it.

We note with regret that William Vogt, editor of Bird-Lore, has resigned his editorship and record with pleasure that he has been appointed as consulting ornithologist with the Peruvian Guano Administration. Certainly much of the fine advance made by Bird-Lore in the past four years must be directly attributable to the excellent work of Mr. Vogt, and his progressive and aggressive editorial policy reflect the recent strides made by the Association. (National Association of Audubon Societies) -- J.W.H.

Condor, The, Vol. XL, No. 6, November-December, 1938.- "Ocean Waifs and What they Mean for Distribution," by Joseph Grinnell and "The Significance of Combat in Male Rosy Finches," by Howard Twining are of general interest. The "From Field and Study" department contains the usual number of notes on far Western birds. As usual with the No. 6 issue, the volume index is included as a feature. (Cooper Ornithological Club) -- J.W.H.

Raven, The, Vol. X, No. 1, January, 1939.- West Virginia students of ornithology will do exceptionally well to read Dr. J.J. Murray's "Some Characteristics of the Canadian Zone in the Southern Mountains," which appears as the feature of this issue. Much of what Dr. Murray has to say has a direct bearing on the West Virginia mountain area, of course, and the entire paper is well worth the attention of any one interested in birds of the two states. Rather than attempt, here, any brief review of an extensive paper of great value, the reviewer respectfully calls attention of readers to an editorial note in this issue, suggesting their own affiliation with the Virginia Society of Ornithology. The issue notes the death of Dr. William C. Rives, author of "A Catalogue of the Birds of the Virginias," at Washington, D.C. on December 18, 1938. Various Virginia Christmas bird census notes occupy the remainder of the issue. (Virginia Society of Ornithology) -- J.W.H.

Wilson Bulletin, The, Vol. L, No. 4, December, 1938.- Under the somewhat misleading sub-title "Western Henslow's Sparrow" in Virginia," appears in "General Notes" of this issue, a brief record of Dr. Lawrence E. Hicks of a breeding colony of Henslow's Sparrows near the Kanawha River, some six miles above Point Pleasant, Mason County, West Virginia. No nests were found, but two males were in song on July 7, 1935, and several females and a juvenal were flushed. An adult male was found dead along a roadside, presumably killed by an automobile. The specimen was found referable to Passerherbulus h. henslowi, the Western race of the species, by Dr. H. C. Oberholzer, of the U. S. Biological Survey. The Eastern race, P.h. susurrans, has been taken, Dr. Hicks notes, by Haller, Handlan, Margolin and Brooks (October 9, 1935, Preston County). Breeding adults with young were seen by Brooks and Haller in Mineral County, July 19, 1936, and adults were seen by Brooks on July 7, 1937, in Grant County.

Mrs. H. J. Taylor contributes a sympathetic and well-written biography of Dr. Lynds Jones to this issue. The remainder of the longer articles and field notes are of general interest. Editor T. C. Stephens retires with this issue and notes that a successor has not yet been selected. It is earnestly to be hoped that as devoted and capable a person as Mr. Stephens may be found to continue his splendid work in behalf the Wilson Club and its excellent journal. (Wilson Ornithological Club) -- J.W.H.

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#### EDITORIAL NOTES

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The REDSTART Index.- The 23-page, mimeographed index to the first four volumes of THE REDSTART represents some 225 "man hours" of compilation, **checking and mimeographing by volunteer, amateur ornithologists** of The Brooks Bird Club. The job is neatly done and a credit to those who participated in the work. The fine spirit and enthusiasm of Mr. Harold J. Bergner, of Wheeling, president of The Club and chairman of the Index Committee, is largely responsible for the success of the index undertaking. He himself cut the 23 mimeograph stencils necessary for the job and contributed some 30 hours of his own time to the work, in addition to cutting the stencils and assisting in running the stencils through the mimeograph machine.

The Virginia Society of Ornithology.- The Editor respectfully suggests to members of The Brooks Bird Club whose homes are in West Virginia, Maryland or other states close to Virginia, the desirability of affiliation with the Virginia Society of Ornithology. The V.S.O. journal "The Raven," is surely one of the best of the state ornithological publications. In the reviews of this issue will be found a note referring to a paper by Dr. J. J. Murray, editor of "The Raven." This, and many others of like nature, make it almost imperative for any interested West Virginian to become thoroughly familiar with the journal of the neighboring state's ornithologists. Full information will be supplied by Miss Florence Hague, Sweet Briar, Virginia.