



# The Redstart

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## THE 1939 MEETING OF THE WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

by  
Maurice G. Brooks

The Wilson Ornithological Club held its annual meeting at Louisville, Kentucky, on November 24-25, 1939, and, as usual, furnished the occasion for the renewal of old friendships and the making of new ones. The papers were timely and interesting, carrying out the policy of the Wilson club, the study of the living bird; the photographic exhibit brought together some 150 examples of the best in the field; and the motion pictures surpassed any which the writer has yet seen.

From Morgantown, West Virginia, I. B. Boggs, Bill Lunk and I were in attendance; Miss McConnell and George B. Thorp flew down from Pittsburgh; and the occasion was made particularly happy by the presence of Misses Hazel Kinslow and Edith Pearson, of the 1936 West Virginia Nature Leaders Training School, and Miss Sylvia Staudt, of the 1939 school. Dr. D. Ralph Hostetter, and Mrs. Hostetter, Jack Calhoun and J. Southgate Y. Hoyt, of our neighboring organization, the Virginia Society of Ornithology, were also present.

Bird behavior and studies of populations continue to challenge the best thought of Wilson Club ornithologists. Arthur Stupka, naturalist of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, presented a paper of unusual interest to West Virginians on the birds of the spruce-fir belt in the Great Smokies. One is struck by the great similarity of the bird life of this and our own mountain regions, particularly on the Cheat ranges. Dr. Lawrence Walkinshaw gave some interesting contrasts in the behavior of Prothonotary Warblers nesting in Tennessee and in Michigan. As might be expected, the Michigan birds have somewhat larger egg clutches, and nest more hurriedly than do those breeding in the more equable climate of west Tennessee. This paper

served to call attention again to our continued failure to find this beautiful bird nesting in West Virginia. It will certainly be found some day in swampy woods along the banks of the Ohio River or some of its tributaries.

Dr. George M. Sutton spoke of his 1939 trip to Mexico and illustrated his remarks with the latest in his series of incomparable paintings of the birds of that fascinating country. Mrs. Margaret Nice continued her reports on the wonderfully careful and detailed studies of the Song Sparrow, which she has been conducting for years. Dr. S. C. Kendeigh presented some recent findings in applying the delicate mechanisms and techniques of the clinical physiologist to the problems of bird behavior. It is an inspiring thing to recall that all three of these persons have achieved international reputations in their respective fields.

Those of us who attended the last Pittsburgh meeting of the A. O. U. some few years ago thought that the motion pictures of birds presented at that meeting represented an all-time high, but, in the judgment of this writer, pictures shown at Louisville fare surpassed the Pittsburgh selections. Outstanding were the films in color by Cleveland Grant, his pictures of the Ruffed Grouse surpassing anything which I have seen. Not far behind in excellence were the films of Karl Maslowski and Olin Sewall Pettinwill, jr.

Deserving of special mention was the splendid work of the local committee on arrangements, under the chairmanship of Burt Monroe. Every detail looking toward the smooth working of the convention has received careful attention, and visitors were much impressed not only by Kentucky hospitality, but by Kentucky efficiency as well.

Next year's meeting, to be held on the Friday and Saturday following Thanksgiving, goes to Minneapolis, where the new natural history museum of the University of Minnesota will be headquarters. An exhibit of bird paintings, so successful as a feature of the Ann Arbor meeting last year, will be held, with Dr. Sutton in general charge of collecting the materials for the exhibit. Although the Wilson Club does not set its meetings more than one year in advance, the Council expects that the 1941 meeting will be held at some point farther East, and, should a formal invitation for a meeting at Wheeling be presented by the Brooks Bird Club, I am certain that it would receive the careful consideration of the Wilson group.

Division of Forestry  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, W.Va.

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NOTE: Mr. Brooks is too modest to note the fact that on November 25, he himself presented a paper on "The Breeding Warblers of the Central Appalachian Region," and that the contents of his paper is of particular interest to West Virginia bird students. Mr. Brooks incidentally, is a member of the Council of the Wilson Ornithological Club. -- Editor.

## FIELD NOTES

Feeding Behavior of a Pied-Billed Grebe:- The sight of water birds always is of especial interest to those of us who inhabit the hill country. The little Pied-billed Grebe is, to me, one of the most interesting and amusing of the water birds. T. Gilbert Pearson, writing for "Birds of America," relates several facts about the ability of this bird to float high, or to settle itself low, in the water and notes its speed in diving. He does not indicate that this speed can be continued under water. In the same article, Audubon is quoted as saying that the food of the "Hill-diver" consists of small fry, plant seeds, aquatic insects and snails. All this is to preface a note concerning an observation made in the Spring of 1939 on the lake created by the newly-erected Tappan Dam, not far from Cadiz, Ohio.

A group of Brooks Bird Club members, winding up a profitable day afield and reluctant to leave the place, were in a car which was being stopped at every likely-looking spot along the lake to see if water fowl of special interest were present.

Four of us were engaged in examination of a flock of Shovellers from the vantage point of our car, when attention was attracted to a Pied-billed Grebe not more than 20 feet away from us, just at the edge of the water. This bird seemed to be having difficulties with a large bit of food, which it seemed trying to get into position to swallow. Observation proved the morsel to consist of a good-sized Green Frog. The bird obviously was trying to maneuver the frog into position so that it could be swallowed head first. The frog's frantic struggles time after time defeated this purpose. Four times during our stay, the frog escaped its captor and took to the water. Each time the Grebe dived after its escaping dinner and recaptured it (or others like it!) and back to the surface

master of the situation. The amphibian, which presumably was fully adult and well-grown, must have been an unusually large meal for the Grebe. The frog's body required a full five minutes to disappear into the Grebe's throat, leaving only the legs dangling from the beak of the bird. A short time later we drove away, leaving the Grebe still holding "in reserve" the dangling frog legs.

-- Russell West,  
Wheeling, W.Va.

Canada Geese in Tyler County, W.Va.:- Flocks of Canada Geese, totalling at least 250 in number were noted by the writer on Oct. 28, 1939, in Tyler County, West Virginia. The observations were made in the general vicinity of the well-known "jug" area of Middle Island Creek. The Geese were close enough to be unmistakably identified as Branta canadensis. The birds were in one flock and were proceeding in a generally southerly direction. The V-shaped flight formation and the wild and musical "honking" of the birds seemed particularly impressive and attracted considerable attention.

-- George Breiding  
Wheeling, W.Va.

Some Summer Birds of Lake Terra Alta:--(\*) During the past several years it has been the writer's good fortune to have camped with others of the West Virginia Nature Training School, at Lake Terra Alta, in Preston County, West Virginia. The school session at Lake Terra Alta usually covers the last week in June and the first week of July and the high elevation of the lake and its surroundings this is a busy season for birds.

However, during the Summer of 1939, in company with Messrs Jim Trace, Pete Chandler, Bill Bierer and Bill Lunk, I had an opportunity to camp for two weeks at the Lake in August, specifically from August 10 to 23 inclusive. During this period we took time from our work at the camp site to make several field trips for birds, to keep notes and compile a general list of the birds observed.

In the woods, the usual early morning chorus was limited to comparatively few call notes of the Veery; while in the open fields and along woods borders, Phoebes, Catbirds, Red-wings and Song Sparrows joined in. The evening chorus of Whip-poor-wills, so prominent in the Spring and early Summer at this location, was limited to the songs of a few birds, only.

Yet birds were exceptionally active in the neighborhood, for Fall migration seemed unmistakably to be in process of preparation for many of these Preston County birds. Many times each day large flocks of Bob-o-links flew above our camp. Late in the afternoon, we regularly witnessed long flights of Nighthawks, Barn Swallows, Cliff Swallows and Grackles. At other times we saw flocks of Cedar Waxwings, Starlings, Red-winged Blackbirds, Cowbirds and Sandpipers.

Of particular interest to us were directions assumed by flights of Bob-o-links and Grackles, respectively. The Bob-o-links always appeared from the Northwest and headed directly Southeast. The Grackles appeared from the Southwest and headed a bit north of East. We noted that, in general, the Waxwings and Cowbirds appeared to follow the flight direction of the Bob-o-links and that the Swallows and Nighthawks appeared to travel the same flight lanes as the Grackles.

We once ventured into the marsh at the head of the lake and found the visit well worth our time from the standpoint of observing birds. We listed the Spotted, Solitary, Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers and found both the Virginia and the King Rails. The Green Heron was noted on the same occasion. A brief visit to the Swallow Falls, Maryland, area resulted in listing the Great Blue Heron and the white, juvenile phase of the Little Blue Heron.

-- Charles Conrad  
Wheeling, W.Va.

(NOTE: See, also, "A Late Summer Day at Terra Alta," THE REDSTART, Vol. VI, No. 11, pp. 73-74, August, 1939, for additional notes on late Summer birds of the area here discussed by Mr. Conrad --- Editor.)

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GENERAL NOTES

The 1939 Christmas Census:- As previously announced, the eighth annual Bird Christmas Census of Oglebay Park will be carried out by the Brooks Bird Club and its guests on Sunday, December 24, 1939. Those who expect to assist with the Christmas Census will meet at the club room at the home of Mr. Russell West, 113 Edgewood Street, Wheeling, at 9:00 a.m. Here the census takers will be given definite assignments for covering Oglebay Park as thoroughly as possible. The hikers are reminded to be prepared for sudden changes in the weather and to dress accordingly. Thermos bottles or jugs of hot coffee and packages of sandwiches should be carried for consideration during a brief noon-time stop during the census-taking. The party will return to the club room at 2:00 p.m., for the work of compiling the separate lists and preparing the Club list for publication in Bird-Lore.

Guests of club members are welcome to participate if they care to do so. Corresponding members of the club are particularly invited to be present for the census.

Club Purchases Mimeograph Equipment:- The Brooks Bird Club has advanced funds to purchase a mimeograph machine and necessary accessories and this equipment now is available for use in the club room at the West residence. Eventually, the cost of the equipment will be shared by the West Virginia Nature Association and by the Oglebay Plant Club.

Members of any of those three organizations are very welcome to use the equipment if they provide the necessary stencils and paper. Other organizations or individuals may arrange to use the equipment, also, for a nominal fee which is to be determined. It is available at any time not previously reserved by the organizations which own it.

S.O.S. !:- The editorial staff of THE REDSTART needs copy! Send us field notes, lead articles, editorial comment or any other material which may be in the minds of readers pertaining to this club and its activities. These notes may be addressed to The Brooks Bird Club at 113 Edgewood Street, Wheeling, or directly to Harold Olson, Marshall Avenue, Elm Grove, Wheeling, or J. W. Handlan, 91 Lynwood Avenue, Wheeling.

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EDITORIAL NOTES

The Wilson Club Opportunity:- If there exists a reasonable chance to secure for Wheeling the 1941 convention of the Wilson Ornithological Club, as is indicated by Mr. Maurice Brooks in his contribution to this issue, it is distinctly up to the Brooks Bird Club to be "up and at 'em!" The Wilson Club never has met in West Virginia, where it enjoys a number of members and where it should have more. It will be recalled that the Brooks Club was well represented at the Wilson's Pittsburgh meeting of several years ago.

If the Wilson Club can be persuaded to schedule its annual meeting either in Wheeling or in Northern West Virginia, the Brooks Club has opened to it an admirable opportunity to make the first visit to the state of any national ornithological group a notable event. It is distinctly an opportunity to do ourselves proud -- and not too early to lay the groundwork preliminary to selection by the Wilson Club of its 1941 meeting site. Let's get going on this opportunity without any delay!

An Old Issue Arises:- The Farmers' Game Protective Association with headquarters in Kingwood, Preston County, West Virginia, recently broke into print as a result of a series of remarkable demands upon the West Virginia State Department of Conservation. The Association is reported to have requested (1) a special, three-day open season on deer for members of the Association and on lands owned by those members, this season to be at least a week previous to the open legal season for the general public; and (2) the right to hunt on Association lands by Association members with nothing more than written permission of land owners, without the necessity of securing a state hunting license, and with any kind of firearm. The petition making these demands was reportedly signed by more than 200 farmers and other land owners. The Association petition set forth that if these requests were not granted by the Commission, lands owned by Association members would be closed to all hunters excepting those whose homes happen to be in Preston County.

The requests were not granted and so far as information is available at this time no general closing of Association lands to non-residents was carried out. Regardless of whether or not this closing of lands occurred, there is more behind the incident than appears in print.

The immediate issue raised is, of course, the ownership of wildlife. That's been settled for a long time and settled by the highest courts of the states and of the nation. The state is custodian of wildlife for all the people and, as legal custodian, enacts and enforces laws protecting wildlife. A land owner is thoroughly within his rights, of course, when he forbids trespass by hunters upon his land. But excepting for certain minor privileges allowed him by law, he and his neighbors are bound by the same conservation laws as is the general public. Nor does the land owner or tenant of land "own" the wildlife which may occur there. It is discouraging to find individuals or organizations whose conviction it apparently still is that they own wildlife.

The Farmers' Game Protective Association forgets certain things when it formulates such a petition, or affects to forget them. It overlooks the fact that without state wardenship of wildlife, with its enforced closed seasons, bag limits and restriction of armament and methods of hunters -- the land owners would have no deer to "protect." It forgets, too, that upon payment of license fees by hunters and anglers rests the entire wildlife conservation program of West Virginia.

Obviously the attitude of the Farmers' Game Protective Association was, in this instance, obviously short-sighted and unfair. The deer kill in Preston County last year was approximately 300 legal bucks and in early returns from this year's season the County led all others in the state in early reports of kills, even though this total seemed to be well down, so far as numbers is concerned. It might, indeed, have been a very good thing for the state's deer herd if enough "furrin'" hunters were barred from Preston county so as sharply to limit the kill.

It is not too extreme to hazard a guess that the Department of Conservation itself sowed the wind which grew into this comparatively innocuous Preston County whirlwind. We refer to Arlie Hull's hunting and fishing preserve. In this preserve, Mr. Hull controls some 2,000 acres of mountain land and sells memberships in his camp, annual fees of some \$10.00 or \$15.00 entitling members to fishing and hunting privileges. So far, so good and Mr. Hull is said to enjoy a reasonably good living as a result of his enterprise. All this would be strictly the business of Mr. Hull and his patrons, if it were not for one thing: That one thing is that Mr. Hull is permitted, or at least has been permitted in the past, to extend certain open seasons upon his property -- extended seasons which, of course, are extended only for his paying patrons.

In justice to Mr. Hull it must be said that he patrols his land well, rigidly enforces bag limits (in some instances these are well under state bag limits) and otherwise does his best to make up to the state the special privileges accorded to him and his patrons by endeavoring to maintain game populations at a level which permits them to extend beyond the boundaries of his own estate.

Nevertheless, this membership hunting and fishing business is scarcely a democratic procedure, at best, and it becomes thoroughly so when special privileges in the matter of open seasons are granted to those who can pay for them -- pay for them not to the State, which would be a bad enough situation, but to an individual! It is to be remembered that all of us have as great an equity in any game animal killed on Mr. Hull's land as does Mr. Hull himself.

Maybe those Preston County farmers and other land owners and tenants figure that they, too, have a right to "cash in" on hunting and fishing just as their neighbor does!

-- J. W. Handlan

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Error: On page 13, third paragraph, read "----- back to the surface the bird and its prey would come. Eventually the bird obtained a "headlock" on its prey and then was master of the situation. -----".

-- Editor