



The Redstart

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Edited by J. W. Handlar

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A GREETING TO THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB

A holiday greeting card postmarked at Martinsburg, West Virginia, and addressed to "The Brooks Bird Club, 113 Edgewood Street, Wheeling, West Virginia," reads: -

"In all sincerity I take this occasion to congratulate 'the gang' on its achievements of these several years. The enthusiasms, loyalties and tolerance, in addition to intelligence, that you have so consistently displayed as a group make up the most encouraging demonstration with which I am familiar. You are showing how to give to life a colorfulness and zest that makes it so much more satisfying! You are also proving that the democratic, self-directing processes can be made to work. More power to you -- keep it up."

(Signed) Nat T. Frame

Editor's Note: See page 21 in this issue of The Redstart.

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS: A REPORT AND COMPARISON

Members of The Brooks Bird Club on December 24, 1939, participated for the eighth annual time in the recording of a Christmas Bird Census for the vicinity of Wheeling. The occasion, incidentally, was the 40th country-wide census sponsored by the magazine Bird-Lore, official organ of the National Association of Audubon Societies. The Wheeling Census:

Wheeling, West Virginia (Oglebay Park, Camp Agaming and vicinity on Big Wheeling Creek, Ohio River Valley from South Wheeling to Beech Bottom, W. Va., parties travelling by automobile to census areas and return.)
December 24, 1939, 9:30 A. M. to 5 P. M., Clear, one inch of snow in hills; light northwest winds; temperature 19 degrees at start and return.
Observers in groups as follows: Party I, five observers, three hours; Party II, four observers, four hours; Party III five observers, three hours; Party IV, three observers, three hours. Total miles afoot, 19; total hours 16 1/2.

Mallard 12; Black Duck, 39; American Merganser, 1; Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1; Red-tailed Hawk, 1; Marsh Hawk, 1; Belted Kingfisher, 1; Red-bellied Woodpecker, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 3; Downy Woodpecker, 25; Crow, 422; Chickadee, 59; Tufted Titmouse, 30; White-breasted Nuthatch, 4; Brown Creeper, 3; Winter Wren, 1; Carolina Wren, 7; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 9; Starling, 7; English Sparrow, 95; Meadowlark, 1; Cardinal, 44; Goldfinch, 1; Towhee, 1; Junco, 140; Tree Sparrow, 136; Song Sparrow, 37. Total Species, 27; Total individuals, 1082. -- Harold Bergner, Russell West, Dorothy Conrad, Mabel Hopwood, Beth Ann Waddell, John Pattison, Walter Ammon, Karl Haller, George Breiding, J. W. Handlan, Edwin Dowler and three visitors. (See note below)

As noted above, three general areas were made centers of the 1939 census activities. A "break-down" of results is shown below:

Species	Camp Agaming and vicinity	Oglebay Park	Ohio River Valley, etc.
Mallard	-	-	12
Black Duck	-	-	39
American Merganser	-	-	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	-	-	1
Red-tailed Hawk	-	1	-
Marsh Hawk	-	-	1
Belted Kingfisher	1	-	-
Red-bellied Woodpecker	1	-	-
Hairy Woodpecker	1	2	-
Downy Woodpecker	7	17	1
Crow	7	215	200
Chickadee	13	45	1
Tufted Titmouse	15	17	-
White-breasted Nuthatch	2	2	-
Brown Creeper	3	-	-
Winter Wren	1	-	-
Carolina Wren	5	1	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	-	9	-
Starling	7	-	-
English Sparrow	39	4	52
Meadowlark	1	-	-
Cardinal	31	13	-
Goldfinch	-	1	-
Towhee	-	1	-
Junco	19	118	3
Tree Sparrow	75	43	18
Song Sparrow	25	2	10

Edited by J. W. H.

Note: Add to the list in the first paragraph on this page - Black Duck, 39.

FIELD NOTES

Behavior of a Red-tailed Hawk Pursued by Crows: - As I 'cycled along a road near Branchland, Lincoln County, West Virginia, on December 8, 1939, I was attracted by the calling of a Crow and looked up to see two large birds wheeling and darting about in the air far above me. Soon I realized that one of the birds only, was a Crow and that the other was a Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo borealis*. As the hawk wheeled, the bright sunlight made the upper tail feathers flash like a "tail-light". The Crow darted and swooped at the larger bird, scolding consistently.

The Hawk finally settled into a tree and its tormenter perched in a nearby tree, continuing its vocal protests all the while. The Hawk rose, was immediately pursued by the Crow and the two flew around a ridge out of my sight. I started on and shortly sighted the Hawk again. By this time it was the center of interest for at least 100 Crows. The Hawk continued the unequal contest in the air for several minutes before it once more came to rest in a tree. The Crows (I counted 115 at this time) circled above the Hawk for a time and finally flew away. I did not see the hawk again.

I know that Crows often attack hawks and that Kingbirds attack both Hawks and Crows, but this happened to be the first time I ever had seen a Hawk attacked by any other bird. Incidentally, an "old timer" who heard me remark the presence of so many Crows, assured me that this was a sign that we would not have a "hard winter!"

--Maxine Thacker
Branchland, W. Va.

Short-billed Marsh Wrens in the West Virginia Spruce Belt: - On July 17, 1938, a group of us found and duly reported in The Redstart, Short-billed Marsh Wrens, *Cistothorus stellaris*, apparently breeding along Gandy Creek, Randolph County, West Virginia. It was a matter of interest to Mrs. Brooks and myself to find these birds again along Gandy Creek, and also along the headwaters of the Dry Fork of Cheat River on September 8, 1939. Of course, these birds were not necessarily breeding locally, but they may well have been. It comes as a continued surprise to us to find these sprightly birds well within the Spruce Belt.

-- Maurice Brooks,
W. Va. University
Morgantown, W. Va.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Thanks to Dr. Frame: - The holiday greeting from Dr. Nat T. Frame, which is reproduced on Page 19 of this issue, has been posted at the club room in the West residence, 113 Edgewood Street, which now is headquarters for the Brooks Bird Club. The Redstart here speaks for the Club in expressing sincere thanks for the encouraging things which Dr. Frame has to say about "the gang" and in promising we'll do our best to try to deserve them!

For the benefit of readers who may not have had the privilege of personal acquaintanceship or friendship with Dr. Frame, it may be noted here that he long has been one of the nation's foremost social planners and organizers, particularly in the rural field. His ability is known and appreciated wherever intelligently directed adult education programs are in progress.

With the exception of a few years spent as regional director for educational activities of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Dr. Frame for more than a dozen years was the guiding spirit of the Waddington Farm program -- later to become the Oglebay Institute program -- based upon Oglebay Park at Wheeling. From early 1937 to May, 1939, Dr. Frame served as Active Director of Oglebay Institute and under his administration that agency enjoyed its best years. He now is associated with the United States Department of Agriculture, with headquarters at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Dr. Frame has been interested in The Brooks Bird Club since its organization. He protests his lack of knowledge and even lack of interest in birds -- as birds. He is vitally interested, however, in what the study of birds can mean to people. Only those who know his vast knowledge of adult education can fully appreciate the extent of the compliment when he writes of this Club as "the most encouraging demonstration with which I am familiar."

---J.W.H.

A Word of Caution as to Local Records:- Mr. Maurice G. Brooks of Morgantown, of the School of Forestry, West Virginia University, contributes the following timely comment:

"All of us who are interested in bird life have frequent experiences with bird observers who are enthusiastic in making records, but who lack the training and scientific background which would make them critical of their own work. Many examples come to mind. Many years ago, an earnest bird observer published a county list which has caused no end of trouble to systematic ornithologists in the state (West Virginia). Many of his records doubtless have real value, but when a shore bird which nests along Hudson's Bay is listed as breeding in the West Virginia mountains; when a western gull is recorded as occurring only when blown in by Eastern storms; when Arctic Three-toed Woodpeckers are reported as occurring sparingly in Southern West Virginia, what is the compiler of records to do?

"Another case in point is a recent published record of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker seen in West Virginia. The writer, one of the most interesting columnists in the state, did not see the bird himself, but takes the word of another observer, simply on the grounds that this observer was sure his bird had a white bill. Every out-door bird student knows that light conditions frequently cause deceptive appearances, and should bear this in mind when recording bird notes.

"In a recent issue of The Redstart a local taxidermist in an Ohio River county was quoted as stating that Snowy Owls are 'fairly common' in his territory. A casual reference to any manual of ornithology will show the unlikelihood of such a statement. Snowy Owls are subject to poorly understood rhythms which cause them to make periodic invasions of our territory, sometimes in considerable numbers. During these invasions it is quite possible that a taxidermist might receive several of the birds, and might conclude from this that the species was locally fairly common. Actually, these periods of relative abundance are interspersed by longer intervals, frequently of several years duration, when Snowy Owls are extremely rare or entirely absent from this portion of the United States.

"There are several sound principles which should govern the publication of bird notes:

"1. Observations made by local, untrained observers, particularly when they relate to rare birds, should be taken with not one, but several, grains of salt.

"2. Before any sight observation is published, it should be checked for points of identification, range, etc. in all the standard manuals of ornithology available.

"3. Sight records should never be published, even in local journals until the observer has eliminated to his own satisfaction every other bird which his example might be.

"4. If the bird in question is out of its usual range, either as to time or space, sight records should, in ordinary circumstances, not be published at all.

"Local ornithological journals, such as The Redstart have an important place to fill among scientific publications, and it is the duty of all of us to strive for the same scientific accuracy as we would expect from the professionally edited journals such as The Auk or The Wilson Bulletin."

Death of Mr. George Hopwood: - The Brooks Bird Club extends its sincere sympathy to Miss Mabel Hopwood, Active Member of the Club, upon the death of her father, Mr. George Hopwood, on January 2, 1940. Mr. Hopwood had been ill for several years and had been unable to continue his work as a potter. His widow and two daughters, Misses Mabel and Ruth, survive him.

GENERAL NOTES

Movies Made at Pymatuning:- Messrs. John Welty, Harold Bergner, Harold Olsen and J. W. Handlan spent the week-end of December 9-10, 1939 at Pymatuning Lake, Pennsylvania, in an effort to take motion pictures of winter birds there. Mr. Welty, an expert amateur photographer of Wheeling, has offered to assist The Brooks Bird Club in obtaining a motion picture record of some of its activities and the winter visit to Pymatuning was to be a part of this record. Unfortunately for the purpose of the visit, three successive days of fine, bright weather climaxed on December 10 in a day of rain and fog. Some excellent black-and-white films of Mallards and Canada Geese were obtained, nevertheless. At this writing, films made in color had not yet been returned from processing, but Mr. Welty anticipates they will not be good, because of the exceptionally poor light conditions under which they were made.

The Club plans this winter to draw up a "scenario" which will outline the general lines to be taken by the proposed movie record of its activities. The film will be used in educational work of the organization in the local field.

Visit to Pittsburgh on January 28:- Third of the Club's general activities of the year is a scheduled trip on January 28, 1940, to view the bird collections of the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh. The Carnegie group has been more than friendly toward this organization and the visit will bring with it an opportunity to renew many friendships. Those who plan to make the trip from Wheeling are asked to communicate with President Harold Bergner, of the Club.

(Note: This visit was originally planned for January 21, 1940 but was postponed to enable the Brooks Bird Club members to meet Carnegie Museum workers who were unable to be present on the date first announced.)

Incidentally, the Brooks Bird Club will be "at home" the week-end of February 17-18 to its corresponding members and their guests. An informal social program is being planned and week-end visitors will be house guests of Active Members during their stay in Wheeling. All Corresponding Members are invited to be present for the event.

For reservations or information, contact the Club President, Harold Bergner, 420 Warwood Avenue, Wheeling, W. Va.

Check your Redstart Files - The few remaining copies of back issues of The Redstart may be obtained for ten cents each. You are advised to look over your file now while these are still available. Send your requests to the Corresponding Secretary, Miss Dorothy Conrad, 423 Warwood Ave., Wheeling, W. Va.