



The Redstart

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

Vol. VII, No. 5

Edited by J. W. Handlan

February 1940

THE CHRISTMAS CENSUS AT OGLEBAY PARK

Russell West

For forty years, the magazine "Bird-Lore", the official organ of the National Association of Audubon Societies has sponsored the "Christmas Census". The January-February number of each year has been devoted principally to the publishing of the reports sent in by individuals and groups.

During the fall of 1932, after the first yearly program had been formulated for the Brooks Bird Club, the question arose regarding the cooperation of the club in this national project. The decision was made, that every year, during the week selected by "Bird-Lore", the Brooks Bird Club would take a census within the confines of Oglebay Park. It was anticipated that eventually the members would desire to "branch out" into neary-by territory so that the published reports would better represent the bird life within the panhandle, but it was agreed that as long as the Bird Club existed, the census would be taken within Oglebay Park. This would give a year to year comparison, one of the principal values of the census. During the eight years of the Club's existence, this plan has been followed. The chart attached to this paper shows this to be true. Attention is called to the fact that the records for 1936 do not disclose the actual count within the Park but includes also a listing of the birds made at Bird Hill in adjoining Marshall County. Otherwise the chart indicates a comparison from year to year.

There is an error in the published report for the year of 1936. THE REDSTART shows a total of 548 individuals whereas the list includes 560. This is presumed to be an error in addition so the attached chart indicates the corrected total.

The census lists for 1932 and 1933 have not before been published in THE REDSTART. For this reason, they are appended as they would have appeared in the first issues of the journal. That for 1932 is taken from the writer's personal files which have been checked with those of John Handlan; the census for 1933 is taken from the minutes of the Brooks Bird Club.

A study of the data below the bird lists on the attached chart will disclose that the writers of the articles from year to year have not been consistent

in publishing full data. It is hoped that this paper will present an inducement to future writers to include all information which may at the time be considered pertinent.

In considering the tabulation of census lists, almost the first thing that attracts attention is that there are five species of hawks, a total of nine individuals. In Oglebay Park, in fact throughout the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia, it is a distinct pleasure to observe a hawk and to place its name on a bird list. Hawks are rarities here. Yet during the seven days time included in the records, more hawks, probably, than any Brooks Bird Club member would find on his West Virginia list for an entire year, are listed. This would seem to indicate that in this area, there are far more hawks during the winter than during the spring-summer breeding and rearing season. Should not this fact be called to the attention of the sportsmen and the farmers? Does it not have a bearing on their attitude toward these birds? Is it not important to them that there are more hawks here during the winter when game is fully grown and more able to care for itself than during the spring and summer when game birds and mammals have young which would be easier prey for these birds?

The lists disclose another item which might be of interest to sportsmen. It seems to be tacitly understood that a covey of Bob-white will inhabit a certain restricted territory year after year unless something happens to exterminate them. Yet here on the Oglebay Christmas Census these birds were found within the Park, where there is not a foot of good cover. In fact there is no good cover for many miles. The Bob-white were found in a cleared, open woodland in a section where have been planted Paper Birches, and Rhododendron, High-bush Cranberry, Haws and a number of other introduced shrubs. There is little food here for Bob-white. Every year, we hear reports of coveys disappearing due to weather or predators. Is it not possible that Bob-white may have a migration during the winter similar to the wanderings of some other birds? If this is true, how much credence can be put into the reports of the winter-kill of coveys which appear in various publications?

The lack of listing of Ring-necked Pheasants in the 1939 Census may or may not be indicative of the decrease in population of these birds within the Park. Counts in some other years have shows but one or two birds. More complete information on this will be obtained during early spring when the birds call frequently at twilight - and on into the night.

Attention is here called to a method of distinguishing between the Hairy and the Downy Woodpeckers. The position of the Downy on the trunk or branch of a tree is almost parallel due to the stubbiness of the bill. The length of the bill of the Hairy causes this bird to stand out from the tree at a considerable angle.

The count of Crows on every list is admittedly inaccurate. It is not possible under the conditions to obtain a good record of the number of these birds. If one census-taker were to remain atop a knoll in the Park until dusk, he would see Crows by the thousands going to the roost.

The recording on "Chickadees" on any winter-time bird list has always been a sore spot to the members of the Brooks Bird Club. Described as two distinct species, both of them winter resident in the area (one species with a form with the type from near-by Bethany, we are unable in the field to determine which

are Black-caps and which are Carolinas. It has been deemed best to list them under the generic "Chickadee" until some method of identification is found.

It appears that Starlings have not yet become settled in their habits on this continent. Note the large counts in Oglebay Park in 1933 and again in 1936. These might be due to the abundance of food on the country-side during these years or to the spasmodic efforts of city officials to chase the birds away from the central portion of the City of Wheeling. Has any one ever studied the winter feeding of these birds in large cities such as Philadelphia, Washington and New York? Is there not the possibility that here lies the solution for control in these cities where Starlings concentrate in such huge numbers during the winter? It might be that poisoned foods, that would not be taken by Pigeons, may be a better method of control than noise-makers.

"Junco" is another general term used on the lists. These birds might be either Slate-colored or Carolina. There is no effort by the Bird Club members to distinguish sub-species in the field for this is considered the work of the laboratory student rather than the field worker. It is mentioned here because, to the extent of the writer's knowledge, no one has published any reports based on specimens about which form might be here present.

It would seem that the counts of Tree Sparrows may depend to a great extent on snow upon the ground. When there is no snow, these birds will be found on the ground where it is difficult to flush them to obtain a count. On the other hand when there is snow upon the ground, these birds feed on the seeds that hang to the weed-stocks so there is less difficulty in finding them.

The following are the reports on the 1932 and 1933 Census lists:

December 26, 1932; cold and clear; Time, 10 A. M. to 3 P. M.
 Bob-white, 17; Ring-necked Pheasant, 11; Hairy Woodpecker, 7; Downy Woodpecker, 31; Crow, 82; Chickadee, 106; Tufted Titmouse, 46; White-breasted Nuthatch, 15; Brown Creeper, 5; Winter Wren, 3; Carolina Wren, 8; Robin, 65; Bluebird, 3; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 9; English Sparrow, 150; Cardinal, 42; Goldfinch, 1; Junco, 39; Tree Sparrow, 62; Song Sparrow, 7. Members cooperating: Helen Howell, Sara Hine, Dorothy Cunningham, Kay Horsburgh, Russell West, James Handlan, John Handlan, Mike Haller, T. E. Shields.

December 24, 1933. Red-shouldered Hawk, 1; Rough-legged Hawk, 1; Marsh Hawk, 2; Sparrow Hawk, 2; Ring-necked Pheasant, 9; Flicker, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 14; Downy Woodpecker, 22; Horned Lark, 14; Crow, 565; Chickadee, 66; Tufted Titmouse, 42; White-breasted Nuthatch, 15; Brown Creeper, 8; Carolina Wren, 4; Robin, 1; Mockingbird, 1; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 11; Starling, 702; English Sparrow, 60; Cardinal, 16; Goldfinch, 10; Towhee, 1; Junco, 46; Tree Sparrow, 12; Song Sparrow, 12.

THE REDSTART references:

January 1935 Vol. 11 #4
 January 1936 Vol. 111 #4
 January 1937 Vol. IV #4
 January 1938 Vol. V #4
 February 1939 Vol. VI #5
 January 1940 Vol. VII #4

COMPARISON RECORD OF BROOKS BIRD CLUB CHRISTMAS CENSUS RECORDS 1932 - 1939
 OGLEBAY PARK, WHEELING, OHIO COUNTY, W. VA.

<u>Species</u>	<u>1932</u>	<u>1933</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1937</u>	<u>1938</u>	<u>1939</u>
Sharp-shinned Hawk						1	1	
Red-tailed Hawk			1		1			1
Red-shouldered Hawk		1						
Rough-legged Hawk		1						
Marsh Hawk		2						
Sparrow Hawk		2		2	1	1		
Bob-white	17				12			
Ring-necked Pheasant	11	9	1	15	5	2	8	
Flicker		1						
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker						1		
Hairy Woodpecker	7	14		1		3		2
Downy Woodpecker	31	22	7	21	3	35	18	17
Horned Lark		14	6			3		
Blue Jay							1	
Crow	82	565	9	80	200	91	200	215
Chickadee	106	66	12	23	37	168	91	45
Tufted Titmouse	46	42	4	5	4	82	30	17
White-breasted Nuthatch	15	15	1	2	3	31	8	2
Brown Creeper	5	8		1	5	15	1	
Winter Wren	3			2		1	2	
Carolina Wren	8	4	2	11		5	2	1
Robin	65	1						
Mockingbird		1						
Bluebird	3					1	1	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	9	11	1	6	1	28	19	9
Starling		702			200	5	23	
English Sparrow	150	60	150	100	41	121	27	4
Cardinal	42	16	4	33	17	28	26	13
Goldfinch	1	10					1	1
Towhee		1						1
Junco	39	46	20	21	11	86	48	118
Tree Sparrow	62	12	5	18	16	54	4	43
Song Sparrow	7	12	1	18	3	1	8	2
SPECIES TOTAL (33)	20	26	15	17	17	22	20	16
INDIVIDUALS TOTAL	709	1538	224	359	560	763	519	491
WEATHER	Clear Cold		Clear Cold	Snow 20°	Cloudy 45-39°	Clear 33-38°	Rain Cold	Clear 19°

FIELD NOTES

Four species of Herons at Jackson's Mill, W. Va.:- At Jackson's Mill, State 4-H Camp in Lewis County, West Virginia, four species of Herons were observed on August 12, 1939. The birds listed included two Great Blue Herons, Ardea herodias, six Little Blue Herons, Florida caerulea, several Green Herons, Butorides virescens, and one immature Black-crowned Night Heron, Nycticorax nycticorax.

The birds seen were feeding along the river channel near the bridge at the site of the old mill. There the stream is shallow and rather swift. Only the Green Herons are known to breed in the vicinity, the others presumably had wandered into the territory after the breeding season. All of the Little Blue Herons noted were in immature plumage.

-- I. B. Boggs,
Morgantown, W. Va.

Wood Duck and Young in Pocahontas County, W. Va.:- Clover Creek flows into the Greenbrier River at Cloverlick, Pocahontas County, West Virginia. About a quarter-mile from its mouth, the creek has been dammed, thus forming a small lake. In the early morning of July 16, 1939, Juanita Rexrode and the writer saw an adult female Wood Duck, Aix sponsa, and six young. The young ducks appeared to be about half-grown. When first seen, the ducks were feeding along the bank of the upper portion of the lake. When they saw us, they swam away slowly, entering the border weeds and disappearing from our sight. In the late afternoon of the same day, others of our party visited the lake but no sign of the ducks was found. This was my first time to see young Wood Ducks within the State.

-- I. B. Boggs,
Morgantown, W. Va.

Chickadee and Titmouse Accidentally Trapped:- A Chickadee, Penthestes, and a Tufted Titmouse, Baeolophus bicolor, temporarily were victims, respectively of natural and man-made traps at Lost River State Park, Mathias, West Virginia.

In early January, 1940, I was watching from a window of our residence, the birds which were visiting an outdoor feeding shelf near the house. A Chickadee was noted pecking furiously at a bur on a large Burdock plant near the feeder. The bird was "upside down", as it seemed to cling to the bur with its feet but kept that position for so long a time as to lead me to suspect it was being held prisoner by the bur. This proved to be the case. When I came near, the bird paid little or no attention to me, continuing its vigorous struggles to free itself from the bur. I then noted that several burs appeared to be hooked between the legs and onto the breast plumage of the prisoner. The Chickadee was freed with some difficulty and taken into our house. The only surface injury seemed to be cuts and scratches in the flesh at the base of the leg. After a "rest period" the bird was released and flew away, seemingly little the worse for its having been trapped.

During the present winter, I have been operating several small traps set near our residence in an effort to secure small mammals for the University at Morgantown. On inspection, one morning, I found a Tufted Titmouse with its legs in one of the traps. The bird was quite still and, when it had been freed from the trap, the legs appeared to be partially paralyzed. The claws

were drawn up tightly and, when pried open, immediately would close tightly again. After a few minutes rest, the Titmouse recovered enough to be able to perch on my finger. After a brief rest in that position, the bird flew to a natural perch near to me and scolded vigorously while I remained in the vicinity.

-- George Flouer
Lost River State Park
Mathias, West Virginia.

Pipit at Charleston, W. Va.:- On the afternoon of October 26, 1938, I was near the Charleston, West Virginia, city wharf. Nearby were a number of crowded residence buildings, whose tenants then had the habit of throwing refuse from back porches to the banks of the Great Kanawha River. These residence buildings fronted Kanawha Street as did the small store buildings occupied by dealers in poultry. Operators of the latter establishments sometimes let live poultry loose to forage on the river bank refuse heaps.

On this particular day a number of domestic fowls, chiefly Turkeys and Ducks were feeding on this refuse. Among these birds, I noted a small bird of "sparrow-like" appearance which walked about and often wagged its tail. The small bird appeared fully as tame as its domesticated fellow feeders and I was able to approach within 15 feet of it. Examined from this distance with the help of good glasses the bird was seen to be an example of the American Pipit, Anthus spinoletta.

-- Clyde B. Upton
12 Hubbard Court
Charleston, W. Va.

Pine Siskins at Gaudineer Knob, W. Va.:- Several years ago, Dr. Lawrence Hicks reported in "The Seasons" department of Bird-Lore the presence of Pine Siskins, Spinus pinus, on Cheat Mountains, near Cheat Bridge, Randolph County, West Virginia. Since summer records for these birds in West Virginia are so scarce, it is worth noting that Siskins were present in some numbers on Gaudineer Knob, in the same mountain range, during July, August and September, 1939. They were seen in both Randolph and Pocahontas Counties.

Most often they were noted in flight, either in small, compact groups or as individuals, but a few were seen feeding in the Red Spruces which cover this high peak. With a little practice, one can easily distinguish their wiry notes from the similar calls of Goldfinches, although it is always well to check this determination when possible. The fire tower on Gaudineer knob offers exceptional facilities for doing this, since several times flocks of Siskins flew past the tower at a level with the top of it.

During 1937-1938, many Siskins were found in the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina, but Mr. Arthur Stupka, Park Naturalist, Smoky Mountain National Park, who reported their presence states that they since have become scarce. The birds in West Virginia may represent a portion of the Tennessee-North Carolina population, or there may be in the extensive Spruce areas in the Cheat mountain ranges an independent population, at least in years when the spruce cone crop is favorable. In any event, the presence of these birds of northern association did much to add to the Canadian flavor of the biota of these fine mountains.

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

EDITORIAL NOTES

Club Visit Pittsburgh and Bethany:- A score of members of The Brooks Bird Club motored to Pittsburgh, Pa., on Sunday, January 28, 1940, where they visited the Carnegie Museum. Through the courtesy of Miss Ruth Trimble, assistant curator of ornithology, the visitors were permitted to inspect the great collection of study skins of birds housed at the Museum. Miss Trimble was present to explain significant facts concerning the collection and to discuss methods employed to secure and preserve the collection.

Mr. M. Graham Netting, curator of herpetology, escorted the group on an inspection tour of the herpetological laboratories. The entire group were guests at a "camp style" dinner at the residence of Mr. Roy Black, naturalist at Frick Park, and Mrs. Black before visiting the Museum.

On January 29, the Club held its regular monthly meeting at Bethany College. Officials of the College gave free use of the assembly hall and motion picture projection equipment for the meeting, which was arranged by Mr. Karl Haller, of Wheeling. A feature was the showing of black-and-white and color motion pictures of the 1937 Oklahoma expedition conducted by Dr. George M. Sutton. Mr. Haller, a member of the party, briefly discussed the films as they were shown.

The Brooks Bird Club is deeply indebted to its friends at Pittsburgh and at Bethany for their friendly and generous helpfulness, which made these two occasions possible.