



The Redstart

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SUTTON'S WARBLER: A REVIEW OF KARL HALLER'S DISCOVERY

Mr. Karl W. Haller, of Wheeling, W. Va., has published in the current number of The Cardinal (1), the description of "A New Wood Warbler from West Virginia" which he proposes be called Dendroica potomac, Sutton's Warbler. His technical description of the bird is accompanied by remarks concerning the taking of the two known specimens. Dr. George M. Sutton, of Bethany, W. Va. and Cornell University, in whose honor the bird is named, follows Mr. Haller's article with brief remarks. The Cardinal illustrated the material by a full-page plate which reproduces in color Dr. Sutton's water-color portrait of the male and female birds on which Mr. Haller's work is based.

Mr. Haller writes that on May 30, 1939, he and J. Lloyd Poland of Martinsburg and Morgantown, W. Va., were conducting ornithological explorations in a scrub pine and deciduous woods 12 miles south of Martinsburg, in Berkeley County, W. Va. The two heard a peculiar bird song, the usual song of the Parula Warbler sung twice in succession without a break. The singer was soon in sight and at first was mistaken for a Yellow-throated Warbler. Mr. Haller collected the bird which proved to be a male in breeding condition. In appearance the bird suggested, in certain respects, both the Yellow-throated and Parula Warblers.

Mr. Poland guided Mr. Haller on June 1 to a wooded river bottom four miles north of Shepherdstown, in Jefferson County, where he had previously heard Parula Warblers singing. There Mr. Haller collected the second known specimen of the new bird, this one a female presumably nesting. It had a large brood-patch and its condition gave evidence that it had deposited eggs.

As a first step toward establishing the status of the new birds, Mr. Haller inquired of curators of the larger collections of the birds of Eastern North America, whether or not these collections included specimens similar to his then unidentified Warblers. A total of about 825 skins of the Yellow-throated Warbler and its racial relative, the Sycamore Warbler, were examined without finding one which closely resembled the new birds.

Mr. Haller and those ornithologists who have assisted him in making comparative study, have been unable to find written references to birds similar to Dendroica potomac. He writes: "The new bird resembles somewhat the Parula Warbler in the presence of a yellowish-olive patch on the back, a trace of brownish on the sides and flanks, a tinge of raw sienna (tawny) across the throat, and a reduced amount of white on the tail. On the other hand, it differs markedly from the Parula in the close likeness between the sexes." As noted before, Sutton's Warbler bears some superficial resemblance, also, to Dendroica dominica.

The author adds that neither Mr. Poland, who is particularly well acquainted with the birds of the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia, nor himself has ever seen a Yellow-throated Warbler in that area. Nor, as he points out, does one investigate every Parula Warbler heard singing!

Dr. Sutton contributes a brief critical comment on the new birds. He asks: "What is this new bird? Is it a well-established, full species, or is it merely a race? Is it, perhaps, an interspecific or an intergeneric hybrid?"

He goes on to point out that D. potomac assuredly can be assigned to the genus Dendroica and that it obviously is closer to D. dominica than to any other known species. He adds: "It is not a race of dominica, for even a well-defined subspecies exhibits to some extent the characters of the species as a whole." Dr. Sutton writes also, that if one is to accept the A. O. U. Check-List concept, dominica's closest relatives in the Eastern United States are the Blackburnian, Cerulean, Chestnut-sided and Bay-breasted Warblers. Neither male nor female of the new bird shows characters of any of these species. The possibility of the new bird's being an intergeneric hybrid is briefly discussed also. Dr. Sutton notes that such hybrids are, as a rule, sterile and that the two birds taken by Mr. Haller were breeding. Certain resemblances of Sutton's Warbler to the Parula Warbler, Compsothlypis americana, and the fact that D. potomac was, in song, much like the Parula tends to the theory that, if the bird is an intergeneric hybrid, the Parula is a possible parent.

Dr. Sutton closes with this: "Further work may reveal that this new bird is a hybrid between Dendroica and Compsothlypis. If such proves to be the case, I for one should be inclined to let down the generic bars and to lump the two groups as one, for I should regard the birds as better judges than myself of the 'boundary line' between one 'group' and another."

Members of the Brooks Bird Club will take particular satisfaction in word of Mr. Haller's discovery. Many of the Club, indeed, have followed with keen interest the various steps which have been made in plans for publication of a description of Sutton's Warbler. Mr. Haller and Mr. Poland, "co-discoverers" of the new bird, both are members and Dr. Sutton is an honorary member of the Brooks Bird Club. The find was made in West Virginia, to which much of the attention of members of the Brooks Bird Club has been devoted. Indeed, members of that organization have made a number of valuable contributions to the ornithological knowledge of the State.

The description of Dendroica potomac is certain to engage the interest of ornithologists, particularly of those whose work has been done in the Eastern United States. Mr. Haller's discovery may do much to call to the attention of eastern ornithologists the fact that West Virginia offers an interesting and little-known territory for their investigation. For those of us "at home" it serves as a reminder that West Virginia, our own "back yard," continues to challenge us

Publication of Mr. Haller's article in The Cardinal brings again to the attention of West Virginians that numerous West Virginia notes appear in this publication from time to time. That journal is edited by Attorney Bavard H. Christy, of Sewickley, issues two numbers a year (January and July) and costs just 50 cents annually for a subscription. The Cardinal handled Mr. Haller's and Dr. Sutton's articles very nicely in a typographical sense and the color reproduction of Dr. Sutton's painting is excellently done.

- (1) Haller, Karl, W., "A New Wood Warbler from West Virginia," The Cardinal, Vol. V, No. 3, pl. and pp. 49-52, January, 1940 (The Audubon Society of the Sewickley Valley, Sewickley, Pa.)

-- John W. Handlan,
Wheeling, W. Va.

FIELD NOTES

Common Loon Near Wheeling, W. Va.:- I watched two Loons, *Gavia Immer*, feeding near the north end of Wheeling Island, in the Ohio River, on October 30, 1939. Both birds, when first seen, were about half a mile upstream and as I watched them, they gradually made their way nearer to me. Occasionally they dived and emerged with fish in their bills. They finally settled down to fishing about 25 yards from the point of the Island. I watched them for about 20 minutes and they finally took to the main channel, calling as they moved downstream.

-- Karl W. Haller,
Wheeling, W. Va.

Turkey Vulture Migrations Near Morgantown, W. Va.:- During the past several years, bird students in the Morgantown, W. Va. area have noted considerable fall migration flights of Turkey Vultures, *Cathartes aura*, in the region near Lake Lynn, Monongalia County, W. Va. Mr. I. B. Boggs tells me that he has witnessed flights of 100 individuals or more, and others have seen smaller groups. On October 20, 1939, Mrs. Brooks and I saw one compact group of these birds near the Ice's Ferry bridge, which numbered more than 60 individuals.

From these scattered observations it seems possible that the Lake Lynn area is on the line of a considerable autumnal migration of Turkey Vultures. No large hawk flights have been seen there nor have numbers of Turkey Vultures been present when hawk flights have been noted on other ridges, so it appears that hawks and vultures follow different routes in their fall movements through our territory.

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

Sharp-shinned Hawk Stoops at Cardinal:- Despite many hours spent in the field, I have yet to see a hawk strike and secure its prey and only twice have I seen a hawk attempt a kill. On November 11, 1938, while engaged in hunting near Sissonville, Kanawha County, West Virginia, I saw an unsuccessful attempt of a Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter velox* to capture a Cardinal, *Richmondia cardinalis*.

An old orchard, with a heavy undergrowth of blackberry briars and tall weeds was the scene of the action. A Cardinal was observed perched near the top of a tree and I had stopped to watch it when a hawk "appeared from nowhere" and stooped toward the Cardinal. The intended victim called in alarm and darted at once into the briars, close to the ground beneath the tree. The hawk attempted to force its way after the smaller bird, but failed and then perched in a tree nearby, as if to watch for the reappearance of the smaller bird. The Cardinal betrayed no sign of its presence and the Hawk, by this time observed to be a Sharp-shin, remained motionless on its perch. After a wait of several minutes I shot the vigilant Sharp-shin.

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

Bachman's Sparrow in Morgan County, W. Va.:- On May 24, 1939, I observed a male Bachman's Sparrow along Sleepy Creek, Morgan County, W. Va. The location was an old field about eight miles southwest of Berkeley Springs, at the entrance to the second bridge across Sleepy Creek as one travels toward the Unger store. The sparrow was atop a low stake from which it was doing all its singing. It flew when closely approached, but presently returned to the perch on which it was first seen. A short search failed to reveal the presence of a nest in the vicinity. This, I believe, is the third reported record for Bachman's Sparrow west of the mountains in West Virginia.

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

EDITORIAL

For several years, the members of the Brooks Bird Club have divided their time and their energies into many channels. Now their responsibilities, both in personal and business affairs are continually increasing, curtailing their activities in volunteer work. Many of the "old guard" are learning that home and vocation must be given first considerations.

The most active members have discussed this condition and have come to the conclusion that 1940 should be devoted to a single object. To this end, they have decided that the Brooks Bird Club, being their best medium, be promoted more than it ever has been before.

Much of the credit for the local nature activities (and some outside the local area) should be given to the folks who make up the membership of the Bird Club. Now that all the energies, and the time, formerly devoted to many activities are to be concentrated on a single object, there is nothing to prevent a season such as has never before been enjoyed by any group interested in bird study.

The Corresponding Members are urged to keep in close contact with the Wheeling group by reading The Redstart carefully, and by personal correspondence. They will find a cordial welcome wherever there are Brooks Bird Club members.

-- Russell West, 113 Edgewood St.
Wheeling, W. Va.

ANNOUNCING A BIRD CLUB FORAY IN JUNE

The Brooks Bird Club invites its members to participate in a one-week ornithological foray to be held June 15-22, inclusive, with headquarters at Lost River State Park in Hardy County, West Virginia. Members of the Club will receive copies of a special bulletin with complete details of the plan, confirmation of the date and place and other essential information. In the meantime, the Club's Executive Committee, headed by Chairman Charles Conrad, has voted unanimously to present this advance information in The Redstart.

The Executive Committee of the Bird Club will handle such details as reservations for the party at Lost River State Park, employment of a camp chef and purchase of food supplies, etc. There will be no "instructors" present nor will formal classes of any kind be conducted during the foray. A number of experienced amateur observers of birds and amateur botanists will be members of the party and less experienced campers will be welcome to join them in a survey of an interesting region.

Lost River State Park consists of some 3,000 acres of rugged land about 17 miles from Moorefield, the seat of Hardy County, and near Lost River -- the stream which gives the Park its name. Within easy reach of the Park are sections of the George Washington National Forest, which lies in Virginia and West Virginia. The well-equipped Park cabins are at an elevation of approximately 2,200 feet above sea level and mountains within the Park reach to about 3,000 feet.

Cabins in the Park, where members of the Club will live, are equipped with electric light, running water and shower baths, comfortable spring beds, lounges and other furniture. Bed linens and blankets are provided as is fuel for cooking and heating.

Cabin rentals approximate \$5.00 a week for each person. The Executive Committee estimates that food, pay of the camp chef and incidentals during the stay at the Park will be covered by \$10.00 additional per person. In other words, the week's outing will cost \$15.00 each. The Executive Committee will do its best to assist those without their own means of transportation to secure a "ride" to and from the Park, but cannot assume responsibility for this transportation. Occupants of each car will arrange with the car owners the matter of sharing costs of transportation.

Most important of all -- reservations should be sent in at once. We can accommodate about 30 people. The first 30 to ask reservations will be those accepted for this enterprise. Inasmuch as a dozen or more active members already plan to take advantage of this opportunity, it behooves those interested to decide quickly whether or not they expect to participate. Inquiries may be addressed to The Brooks Bird Club, 113 Edgewood Street, Wheeling, W. Va.

-- John W. Handlan
Wheeling, W. Va.

NOTE:

Be sure to address inquiries and reservations to the above-noted address to insure their prompt receipt.

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL JOURNALS

Auk, The, Vol 57, No. 1, January 1940:-

Dr. Alexander Wetmore contributes a note on woodpeckers taken in West Virginia during 1936 and 1938 by Mr. W. M. Perrygo. An example of the proposed Boreal Flicker, Colaptes auratus borealis, was taken on Flat Top Mountain at 3,000 feet elevation above sea level. Hairy Woodpeckers and Downy Woodpeckers from Wayne County were assigned, respectively, to Dryobates v. villosus, the Eastern Hairy Woodpecker, and Dryobates pubescens medianus, the Northern Downy Woodpecker. A biographical sketch of the late S. Prentiss Baldwin, of Gates Mills, Ohio is included in this issue. Of the technical material, E. A. McIlhenny's "Sex Ratio in Wild Birds," is of especial interest. A half dozen races and proposed races of the Carolina Wren are discussed by George Lowery, Jr. (American Ornith. Union)

Bird-Lore, Vol. XLII, No. 1, Jan.-Feb., 1940:-

Dr. George M. Sutton's "Drawings of Living Birds" is an amusing and interesting feature. Four full-page reproductions of the heads of wild waterfowl accompany the article. A supplement with this issue includes the Christmas Census reports. Only two are reported from West Virginia, that of the Brooks Bird Club and one made by Mr. I. B. Boggs, at Morgantown (20 species and 414 individuals reported). We miss for the first time in years a report of a census at French Creek, West Virginia. A Pittsburgh census reports 24 species and 232 individuals. One from Buckeye Lake, Ohio, lists 73 species and 6,429 individuals. The veteran Mr. Harry B. McConnell and his party at Cadiz, Ohio, found 22 species and 336 individuals. (National Association of Audubon Societies).

Cardinal, The, Vol. V, No.3, January 1940:-

Mr. Karl W. Haller's and Dr. George M. Sutton's contributions to this number are discussed elsewhere in this issue of The Redstart. Mr. Maurice Brooks of Morgantown calls attention to the numbers of "Birds' Nests Along a Public Highway". There are a number of field notes relating to West Virginia included in the issue. (Audubon Society of Sewickley Valley.)

Condor, The, Vol. XLII, No. 1, Jan.-Feb., 1940:-

A biography of the late Joseph Grinnell is a lead feature in an issue dedicated to his memory. The biographer is Hilda Wood Grinnell. A Grinnell bibliography lists 554 titles. (Cooper Ornithological Club.)

Natural History, Vol. XLV, No. 2, February, 1940:-

"Adventures With the Roseate Spoonbill," by Karl H. Maslowski and Peter Koch includes spectacular photographs of these little-photographed birds. R. M. Gilmore reviews Paul Russell Cutwright's "The Great Naturalists Explore South America," of interest to Brooks Bird Club Members because of their acquaintances with the author and members of his family. (American Museum of Natural History.)

-- J. W. H.