



The Redstart

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J. Harold Olsen, Editor

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIRD OBSERVATION

J. Harold Olsen

Members of The Brooks Bird Club whose homes are in or near Wheeling, W. Va., have anxiously awaited this month of March '41 that they might again conduct the spring field trips held each year for the observation and study of the migrating birds as they come through this tri-state area. First major field trip for the Club is an all day event, to Tappan Reservoir in eastern Ohio. The dam on Little Stillwater Creek, in Harrison County, is some six miles southeast of Dennison, and one mile northwest of Tappan, Ohio, and occupies some 2,350 acres with a water-capacity covering 3,100 acres. Club members "discovered" this area, so to speak, in the spring of 1939 when Judge John G. Worley and H. B. McConnell, both of Cadiz, Ohio, and their friends were kind to recommend the territory and the opportunities.

Members will meet at Tenth and Main Streets, Wheeling, at 10 o'clock Sunday morning, March 16. From there they will drive to Cadiz to meet Worley and McConnell and others of their group who are to accompany them on the day's trip. Worley has been named leader for the entire assembly. Corresponding members, and non-members interested in attending this, or any and all other field trips of the Club are cordially invited to do so. If possible they should write, or call Charles L. Conrad, director of field trips, to make an arrangement for meeting with the members, arranging transportation (the Club is not responsible of course, for transportation for any non-member although they will make every effort to supply the necessary accommodations as they always have done) etc.. With the exception of sharing the cost of gasoline, and oil with the drivers of the automobiles, and of their own meals, there is no charge to participants in any of the field trips.

In May, 1939, Handlan (1) wrote of finding waterfowl in numbers and variety that previously were beyond "the club's immediate field of operations" and listed loons, grebes, Mallards, Black Ducks, Baldpate, Pintails, teals, Coot and Shoveller, Redheads, Ring-necked Duck, Mergansers, Gulls, Wood Ducks and others not commonly seen by those of us living on the West Virginia side of the Ohio River.

On Saturday, April 5, 1941, the members of the Club will drive to the Pymatuning Lake area for the "annual spring round-up" as the director of field trips, Charles Conrad, has termed it, of many active and corresponding members and other friends not officially connected with the organization, to be held that night in "The Traveller's Hotel" in Linesville, Pennsylvania. Cars will leave Wheeling during the morning and afternoon of that Saturday, and everyone will meet that night for an informal party in the Hotel. Reservations for rooms, or information concerning transportation, departure and arrival times, etc., may be addressed directly to Charles Conrad, 418 Warwood Ave., Wheeling, or to the Club at it's headquarters at 113 Edgewood St., Wheeling.

Shortly after daybreak on Sunday, April 6, the members of the group will drive to the observation points along the causeway for several hours observation before returning to the hotel for breakfast at eight o'clock. After a brief discussion and comparison of field notes following breakfast, they will return to the "field" to work until dinner.

More than eight years have elapsed since the water courses of Pymatuning Swamp in Crawford County, Pennsylvania, and Ashtabula County, Ohio, were dammed to create the Pymatuning Lake as we know it now. As each year passed more and more species of birds - and particularly water fowl - were found during migration, and each year some stayed to make Pymatuning a nesting ground.

Although the dates chosen by the club are not the "peak" of the migration, they are very close to it and there should be many, many water fowl to study. Pymatuning lies directly on the route of the great Atlantic Waterfowl Flyway which extends from the Atlantic Coast west to the Allegheny Mountains and curves northwestward across northern West Virginia, western Pennsylvania and northeastern Ohio to Lake Erie. Many of the ducks and geese that breed in the north and in the interior of the northwest follow this route in travelling to and from their wintering ground on the coast. It also lies not far from the Mississippi Flyway, a route that extends through the Mississippi Valley eastward to Lake Erie.

In April, 1938, the Club made one of the only two records for the Red-throated Loon, Gavia stellata, for Pymatuning (2). Merit Skaggs made the other record ten days later. It must be considered a rare migrant - but it might be seen again this year. As early as April 2, (1934) Black-crowned Night Herons, Nycticorax nycticorax, have been seen at the Lake, and during the summer are commonly seen fishing in the waters. March 10, is the earliest record for Whistling Swans, Cygnus columbianus, and during the visits the Club has made in the past few years in the month of April has been a regular migrant.

There are a number of records (3) of the occurrence of the European Widgeon, Mareca penelope, in the Pymatuning area, many of them in early April. Very common should be: Mallards, Black Ducks, Baldpates, Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Ducks, Scaup Ducks, Coots, and Herring Gulls, among other species. A few species not so abundant, but always found: Pintails, Green-winged Teal, Shovellers, Redheads, Golden-eyes, Buffle-heads, and the Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls.

The Wood Duck has been listed by some observers as being a common migrant, but the Club members missed it in 1938. Trimble records only one report of the finding of the Old Squaw, Clangula hyemalis, that on April 6, 1937 at the spillway near Linesville. It is a deep water duck, and probably remains far out in the deep water where it is not easily observed.

- (1) Handlan, John W., THE REDSTART, Vol. VI, No. 8, May 1939, Pages 51-52
- (2) Bergner, Harold J., THE REDSTART, Vol V, No. 7, April 1938, Pages 44-46
- (3) Trimble, Ruth (Mrs. J. C. Chapin) Annals of Carnegie Museum, Oct. 1940, Changes in Bird Life at Pymatuning Lake, Pennsylvania.

GENERAL NOTES

John W. Handlan Resigns presidency:

At a meeting of the executive committee of The Brooks Bird Club, February 14, 1941, John W. Handlan, charter member of the Club, resigned the presidency and announced his intention of accepting a position on the editorial staff of the Herald-Dispatch, a morning daily newspaper in Huntington, W. Va.. He will continue his association with the Club as a corresponding member. Handlan's home address at Huntington is 1112 Fifth Avenue.

At that meeting, members of the committee expressed to him their reluctance to accept his resignation, and that they could do so only with the inclusion in the acceptance report, their deepest appreciation of every assistance and guidance he had given to them during the nine years of the Club's activities.

Handlan might well be named the "Dad" of the Brooks Club for he was active in nature programs in this vicinity before its organization. As early as 1927 when the Agricultural Extension Division of the West Virginia University assumed the planning and guidance of a program of recreation and adult education based upon what was then Waddington Farm, he was actively participating in nature study. Of significance in connection with the Brooks Bird Club was the fact that an active nature study program for the public began in early 1928. In the spring of that year a committee was formed to plan and sponsor a school for the instruction of adults in the essentials of nature study leadership. The ten-day school, directed by Dr. Bertha Chapman Cady, of New York, proved highly successful and was the first of an uninterrupted series of such "Nature Leaders Training Schools" which have occurred annually.

That school, together with public field trips and a general increase of interest in nature study resulted in a dinner and meeting of the West Virginia Nature Association on September 22, 1932 and the formation of "special interest" groups. Out of this group came the Brooks Bird Club with Handlan named as a temporary chairman and later elected first president of the new club. He continued in that capacity for several years. For these past five years he served as Editor of this journal, and in September 1940 was again elected to the presidency in which capacity he continued until his resignation last month.

---J. H. O.

Active Member Becomes a Correspondent:

On January 14, 1941 a past president of The Brooks Bird Club, Harold J. Bergner, of Warwood, found his "number" had been called by the Selective Service Board of Ohio County and that he was to serve in the United States Army for one year. He was sent first to Clarksburg, W. Va., then to Fort Hayes, Columbus, Ohio and is now stationed in Fort Bliss, Texas. Readers of THE REDSTART know Bergner well, for he has long been active in all of the Club's programs.

---J. H. O.

Another Member "Called":

Since the note concerning Bergner was written, the Editor has talked with Robert Murray, of New Cumberland, W. Va., a corresponding member of the Club, who says that he, too, has been called by the Selective Service Board and that he leaves March 25, 1941. "Bob" and his brother William Murray both have been active in the "Nature Training Schools" and Bird Club programs.

---J. H. O.

EDITORIALS

George Breiding Appointed Acting President:

At the regular meeting of The Brooks Bird Club on February 28, the recommendation of the executive committee that George Breiding be appointed acting president of the Club to finish out the term ending in September 1941, and, to fill the vacancy on the executive committee, met with unanimous approval of the members present. Breiding long has been interested in nature study although he has not been an active member of the Club as long, perhaps, as some of the other members. He has, from time to time, assisted in the formation of the policies for the organization and as a result, understands the set-up and operations of the various committees.

THE REDSTART extends to him heartiest congratulations upon his appointment and promises every assistance in helping him to continue the splendid work of John W. Handlan.

West Virginia State Bird:

News item: Charleston, W. Va., Feb. 10. -- (AP) -- Senator Paull (D. Brooke) introduced a resolution favoring the Tufted Titmouse be chosen the state bird for West Virginia.

The above release from the Associated Press has brought about a storm of editorial abuse from papers of all sections of the state. "Editor Cal Price of The Pocahontas Times," writes Malcolm Brice, Editor of The Wheeling News-Register, * "scorns the Tufted Titmouse for West Virginia's state bird. Editor Price says the honor should have gone to the Blue Jay and even picks the common or garden crow as more representative than the titmouse.

"Legislature recently adopted the titmouse as our state bird and the choice immediately received a rising vote of censure all over the state. In the northwest panhandle, the Cardinal is much the most popular bird both for the plumage of the male, the song of both male and female and because it is an all-year round bird in this locality.

"Main objection to the titmouse seems to be it is too insignificant and bears too close a resemblance to the Common English Sparrow to be singled out as a feathered symbol of a great state like West Virginia."

Earlier in the month "Pughey Bullerton" (presumably Editor Brice) wrote a cutting satire ridiculing Senator Paull for his choice of state bird. ". . . Titmouse! It sounds like choosing sides for a ball game or the starboard handle on Old Bossie. Can you envisage tobacco-chewing mountaineers going for a titmouse and a tufted one at that?

"In the name of heavens why pick on the titmouse when there are dozens of birds with hair on their chests from which to choose. There's the woodpecker for example, a gaudy animated varmint that goes to work on a tree like a CIO picket. . . . Rather than the titmouse, we'll take the starling, as ornery a pest as ever dropped a bomb on the porch roof. . . . Sid Hatfield, who always packed four rods, would probably think a titmouse was some kind of a deputy sheriff. . . . We got a feathered critter peculiar to this state that is not only noble in nature but wilder than a Hollywood ingenue after her third divorce. We allude to the wild turkey, a dive-bomber that has been productive of more liars than the second World War. . . . A trained squadron of wild turkeys would stop Adolf Hitler in his tracks. They'll outfly a Messerschmitt in low gear and laden with pineapples, would reduce Berlin to shambles. . . . Our ornithologists must drink queer tea when they permit the mere mention of titmouse with that of our state bird."

If Pughey Bullerton had only known, he might have taken another "dig" at the Senators for the AP quotes: "The titmouse is an unusual bird," said Senator Fleming. "When it goes up a tree it goes headfirst, when it comes down it comes headfirst ." He probably had heard of a White-breasted Nuthatch and attributed its characteristics to the titmouse.

Perhaps ornithologists of the state do "drink queer tea" for allowing a bird to be chosen that evidently is not favored, but this Editor first heard that the legislature was considering the matter on February 10, and by the fifteenth of the month it was announced that the senate had voted to make the titmouse the state bird, and that "the House of Delegates must, of course, concur."

*Wheeling News-Register, Vol. LI, No. 162, March 4, 1941, page four.

---J. H. O.

1941 ORNITHOLOGICAL FORAY

Readers of THE REDSTART are again urged to send to the Foray Committee, their suggestions for dates, policies and a site for the 1941 Brooks Bird Club Ornithological Foray. The committee meets Friday, March 14, to consider the suggestions already received. Mail yours to them. It's your Foray!

FIELD NOTES

Blue Jays in Busy City Section:

From a window of my room in downtown Huntington, W. Va., I heard and saw a Blue Jay, Cyanocitta cristata, the morning of February 24, 1941. The bird was in a tree on a main-traveled street less than one-half block from Huntington's business district. Later in the morning I saw two Blue Jays together in trees on the same street but some half-dozen blocks from the business section.

---John W. Handlan
1112 Fifth Avenue
Huntington, W. Va.

Ducks and Geese in Wheeling, W. Va.:

The week of November 12, 1940, throughout this tri-state area that lies about Wheeling, W. Va., was cold and strong winds and snow prevailed. Flocks of Canada Geese, Branta canadensis, were observed flying over Fulton, an out-the-pike section of Wheeling and, over Warwood, a section lying to the northward along the Ohio River. Several of these flocks numbered forty to fifty birds while others were smaller. One flock, seemingly confused, circled a tall building in Warwood for over an hour "honking" continuously. Their circling and calling did not cease until after dark when they flew away. Reports came to the writer that large flocks of geese were settling on the tops of a few of the wooded hills on several nights of that week, but he did not have the opportunity to observe the birds.

A note appeared in the local daily newspapers that large flocks of geese and swans had rested, briefly, on small bodies of water in Somerset County, Pennsylvania.

In Marshall County, in the Big Wheeling Creek area, five miles from the center of the residential district of Wheeling, W. Va., Wood Ducks, Aix sponsa, were found. Along the Ohio River, between Wheeling Island and Warwood, numbers of Herring Gulls, Larus argentatus were found and a few flocks of ducks in which only the Scaup Ducks, Nyroca (sp.?) were identified.

---Charles Conrad,
Warwood Avenue
Wheeling, W. Va.

Pileated Woodpecker in Marshall County:

On February 16, 1941 some of the members of the Brooks Bird Club conducted a bird hike in the Big Wheeling Creek area in Marshall County, W. Va., and during the trip, climbed the hills in back of the Cedar Rocks Country Club. As we

stood at the base of one of the hills, we heard the "pecking" of a woodpecker and were guessing at its identity. A few minutes later we heard the call of the Pileated Woodpecker, Ceophloeus pileatus, and all the members present who knew the call agreed that it was that species. The bird called intermittently for perhaps ten minutes. Numbers of chickadees, titmice, and Song Sparrows were found during the hike.

---Walter Rybeck
Park View Lane
Wheeling, W. Va.

White-eyed Vireo in Ohio County:

A discussion following a meeting of one of the committees of the Brooks Bird Club several weeks ago happened upon the subject of White-eyed Vireos, Vireo griseus, and the fact that no nesting record had been established for this species, as yet, in the Ohio County. The writer well remembers one hike he and Ralph Bischof made back of Fulton Heights, Wheeling, W. Va. and in Ohio County.

It was June 13, 1940 when we first heard the song and call notes of the vireo in this particular spot and during the four following days we looked for the nest of the birds, laboriously searching every possible nest site. During those days, we found three pairs of the birds, and several that to us looked like well-developed young birds. On the last day of our visits to the section, we found an empty vireo nest in a thicket that had been used by the birds. Our conclusions were, of course, that the young birds we saw had been hatched nearby, and that this was probably their nest. Naturally it can't be used as a nesting record, but it is close enough to be listed as an "almost" record.

---George Breiding
National Road, Fulton
Wheeling, W. Va.

Crows Eat a Flicker - Nicholas County, W. Va.:

In February, during the extensive snow storm of this year, some study was made of the Crow, Corvus brachyrhynchos, in this vicinity. Where shocks of corn were still standing, the birds were found in corn fields, but to judge from the numerous scratchings in nearby woods they preferred animal food to vegetable; very little of the hard grains of corn had been eaten.

An amazing find, to me, was the remains (feathers) of a Flicker, Colaptes auratus, which had been eaten by the crows. The signs were fresh and only Crow tracks were to be seen in the snow about the scene. That there had been a struggle, I could tell by the spattered feces, a sign that is commonly found where a bird has met a violent death by some predator. I have known young chickens to be taken by crows, but this is my first record of a wild bird having been taken.

---William C. Legg
Mount Lookout, W. Va.