



The Redstart

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THE OUTLOOK FOR THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB

When Chuck Conrad discussed the idea of an article with this title to be used in THE REDSTART, we decided that each of us would write out his own ideas and the following was not intended for use as a transcript but only as representing the views of each individual. We are publishing the opinions of three members just as they were written for purposes of discussion. The Editor offers his apologies for his presumption on the good nature of his fellow members.

--Editor

Ten years ago, 'way back in '31, a couple of fellows got the idea that we needed a Bird Club so we could learn more about birds, Then followed a couple of other suggestions and before long there was welded together an organization dedicated to the study of the bird life of a 750-acre area in Ohio County, West Virginia, It was a grand idea and it worked wonderfully well. A dozen people got together and became excellent bird students, They grew to form one of the finest bird study clubs and one of the most popular organizations for this purpose in the entire United States.

Then one day one of the members sat down while watching for spring warblers and meditated on this new thing that was called the Brooks Bird Club. What was going on here? Why here were individuals now numbering about two hundred, all of whom had become good bird students and all of whom were intensely interested not only in the out of doors but also in the activities and the well-being of every other person who had ever evidenced an interest in the Bird Club. This person found that somehow or other a wonderful experiment in adult education had been evolved and put into practice. And it was eminently successful!

So the folks sat down and talked over this most astounding development. From then on, the program was a study in the activities of adults in their spare time. There was not only the study of the birds of the local area, but the bird population of the entire state and the surrounding territories was included. This necessitated trips, camps, hotel accommodations, etc. Every fall there was a reunion of the people from away from Wheeling and this entailed preparations for their entertainment.

Every October two hundred people would come into town to participate in the fun and the frolic for a full twenty-four hours. And they received the ultimate in entertainment.

The one day in spring one of the members was watching for the migrant warblers and meditating on the affairs of the Bird Club. What had happened? Here were hundreds of people, some within the area of Wheeling and some, hundreds of miles away who had a common bond of communion! They were all interested in the study of birds, yes. But far more than that they were willing and anxious to pass on their information to any others who might be interested. When they got together they could have the most wonderful parties. They put on excellent shows. They walked, talked, sang and lived an ideal existence.

The Executive Committee huddled again to consider this phenomenon. The program would be on a basis of "enjoying an education after school". In the future the finding of a new bird, the extension of the range of a plant, the carefully thought-out instructions of a teacher would be the theme of a song and the subject of a toast.

They wrote songs, scripts, dialogues. They entertained themselves and all with whom they came in contact. They found birds out of the range of the standard manuals. They put them into songs. Rattlesnakes were killed and their internal structure studied with the help of members who knew of the anatomy of animals. They compared plants and animals and rocks and temperatures. They were ecologists with songs in their hearts.

And when the end of the day came, it was necessary to sit down to compare notes, the ornithologist, the botanist, the entomologist, the geologist, the astronomer, the teacher, the student, the neophyte and the friend. A campfire was the ideal inspiration. They all sat down together around the light of oak, pine and hemlock logs. The stars shone overhead. The fog drifted on from the lake. The Whip-poor-will called. The odor of burning logs chased away the thoughts of the outer world. Comments and conversation and song increased. Then the spell of the wildwood settled down. Individuals merged in spirit. The Brooks Bird Club had entered the final stage of its existence.

Men did not discuss business; women did not talk of clothes. Conversation and song died down. There was a commune of individuals into the thing that is represented by the dancing flames of a campfire. The world once again was uncivilized and had reverted to the elemental. Men and women together for self-preservation and the blending of responsibilities of the sexes and the individuals.

In the light of the campfire, we watched the Brooks Bird Club be born, live and die. But like the birth, life and death of the Brooks Bird Club was to be far beyond the limits of the normal, average person. And each individual who had participated in the life of this group was part of the life of the whole.

Now, after a full decade of service to others, and to the living of a full life for ourselves, we come to a point which is beyond the control of any one person or of any group of persons. It is the complete severance from the ideals and the mythology of democracy that has been built up for us and built up by us within ourselves.

Individuals are being taken away against their wills. What tomorrow will bring for us, we do not know. But we are asked for our forecasts.

My forecast is contained in the history of the Brooks Bird Club. We might disband tomorrow. But the things we have done, the ideals we have instilled in ourselves and in others will live as long as the individuals themselves. The force of circumstances may take away our bread and butter but they can never take away the memories of the campfires and the good times we have had together.

While the fiscal birthday of the Brooks Bird Club will be in September of 1942 and the official celebration of our birthday will be at the annual reunion in October 1942, we know that today we have completed ten full years of service that will continue to be a small part of our nation's history.

And for the balance of 1942? Many individuals will be called to military service; all will be drawn for various types of civilian duties; most will be at work on defense and victory production. But the ideals and ideas of the Brooks Bird Club? The active members are pledged as individuals to continue to the fall of 1942 to complete a full ten years of activities. They promise faithfully that there will be a grand reunion. They acknowledge their obligation to themselves and to others to keep the spirit of the campfire in their minds and their hearts as long as breath is within them.

We do not know how long the Brooks Bird Club will be permitted to continue as an organization. But we do know that the ideals and the fundamentals behind that group will live in the hearts of each of us forever, at peace or at war.

The future of the Brooks Bird Club? That is problematical. The future of the ideals of the Brooks Bird Club? As long as logs will burn in a campfire, our service and our hopes will continue to live in the hearts of free men.

--Russell West
113 Edgewood Street,
Wheeling, West Virginia

According to Webster, the word "organize" is defined as follows: "to work or carry out a plan efficiently; put into working order". Well, that is, in so many words, what took place way back in September of 1932 when a small group of people banded together and formed the organization that is now well known as the Brooks Bird Club.

Year after year this group of nature-minded people carried out the ideas and plans of its membership and on the whole I feel sure that each year was one of progress, although there were many difficulties to overcome. As a result, the Brooks Bird Club has given to some two hundred people the finest friendship and enjoyment in their life. The answer to this lies in the program that was carried on for it was built on one main factor "nature". And no matter how hard you may search you can find no better way to make people feel free and enjoy life better, than in the great outdoors.

During these ten years we have spent many hours, days and weeks together in our homes, at the Club and in the field. We have talked together, we have walked together; and we have hiked and camped together; we have enjoyed reunions, parties and song feasts; local and distant field trips and deep in the memory of most of us we can recall many of these occasions as we sit about the campfire and watch the flames mount high and higher.

Now, after a full decade of such activities the Brooks Bird Club has come face to face with a situation that is far beyond the control of any individual or group of persons. What the future may bring for us, we do not know. But one thing we do know is this - the Brooks Bird Club will live on forever, if not as a group, then as individuals. And a number of these same individuals who are able under the circumstances, have pledged themselves to carry out as long as they can whatever club activities are possible and under all circumstances publish THE REDSTART. It is my personal theory that through the regular publication of THE REDSTART in some form, come what may, the Brooks Bird Club as an organization can go on and on. What I mean is simply this - in short - THE REDSTART can be the voice of the Bird Club membership and through it we can still be united and keep in contact with all individuals whether home or abroad.

To do this we must have the cooperation of every member of the club, active and corresponding alike. I believe a monthly or bi-monthly note or card addressed to the club, telling about your activities and expressions which could be used for publication and kept on file at the club for any inquiries from other members who would like to write personal notes would be of great value.

As for club activities, perhaps some change undoubtedly will be made in the field trips. However walking is free and for those who can, more local hikes and outings will be substituted. Any changes from the schedule published in THE REDSTART will be announced.

Concerning the Foray - the Executive Committee has discussed it thoroughly and an announcement on the status will be published in January. At present, it seems that future announcements, pending upon circumstances, will have to hold forth for any camping at Lake Terra Alta.

Monthly meetings should and will be carried on as long as there remains an active membership. This same decision applies to the regular Tuesday night informal get-to-gethers. Really and truly, here is one phase of the bird club program that is given little or no publicity but one of the most important in the success of The Brooks Bird Club. In some future issue of THE REDSTART an explanation of this feature of the program will be published.

While the fiscal birthday of The Brooks Bird Club will be in September 1942, the plan for its celebration will be carried out at the 1942 Nature Reunion the first weekend in October. This is one event that the club is really counting on and would like more than ever to have every nature student who can to attend. Let's all make a special effort to get there because at that time we can at least talk these things over and above all refresh our treasured memories as we gather round a blazing campfire.

So let's all do our part and keep the memories of the campfire burning.

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

THE REDSTART

Keep getting it out on monthly basis.

- (1) If necessary, cut from 7 to 5 pages.
- (2) Double Issues, 10-12 pages.
- (3) Keep Nos., Jan.-Feb., 1-2, etc.

FORAY

Hold up plans for the Foray until later.

- (1) Foray is justified - transportation problem.
- (2) Substitute weekend camps at Terra Alta.

MEETINGS

Should have a definite program.

---John W. Handlan
409 41st, S. E.,
Charleston, W. Va.

(Handlan's outline has been drawn from correspondence with Charles Conrad. Handlan forwarded not only a number of articles for use in THE REDSTART, but he sent also a detailed letter regarding his "outlook for the Brooks Bird Club". We are taking advantage of the suggestions which he has offered and are including them in this issue of THE REDSTART. ed.)

CHRISTMAS CENSUS ANNOUNCEMENT

Continuing the efforts and activities of past years, the Brooks Bird Club plans to hold their annual Christmas Census on December 21, 1941. As this is a Sunday, the members will have the time available to spend the entire day in the field.

At ten o'clock in the morning the group will meet at the clubroom at 113 Edgewood Street, Wheeling, to begin their group activities. On their way to this point, most of the group will carefully observe the birds to be found on their route and their trips will take them through territory which normally is productive of "good birding". Thus, by ten o'clock, the most favorable portion of the day will have already been devoted to determining the bird population of a goodly portion of Ohio County. The balance of the day will be devoted to confirmation of these preliminary reports and the inclusion of birds in areas not covered by the early hikers.

As in the past, a considerable portion of the time of one of the groups will be spent in Oglebay Park. Almost ten years ago, the Brooks Bird Club has held their first Christmas Census in this 750-acre area and each year have continued this activity so that there would be a year-to-year comparison. Thus, the annual Christmas Census not only checks the bird population of Oglebay Park, but continues to give some idea of the resemblances and variances in the bird-life in Ohio County.

For those individuals who have not the time or the inclination to come out early in the morning, the announcement is made that the group will meet at the Rybeck's residence at two o'clock. At this point, there will be inaugurated an innovation for the group (that is under their sponsorship). At the Rybeck's residence a "bird's Christmas Tree" will be decorated. An evergreen tree will be selected in an appropriate location. The members and their friends who are in attendance will decorate this evergreen with apples, bread, popcorn and other dainties that would attract the local avian population.

Those individuals who desire to do additional work should report to Executive Chairman, Charles Conrad, who will assign them to cover the area along the Ohio River and at some points in Marshall County as has been done in previous years.

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

FIELD NOTES

Loon and Least Tern in the Kanawha Valley:-

Mr. C. B. Pierle, of Charleston, West Virginia, director of the State Conservation Commission's Division of Game Management, has informed me that during the last week of October, 1941, employees of a Charleston industrial plant brought to him for identification an immature Loon, Gavia immer. The bird, very much alive and apparently uninjured, was found on the ground within a high fence surrounding the industrial plant. Mr. Pierle released the bird in the Great Kanawha river near the state capitol. It dived immediately, reappeared on the surface and alternately swimming and diving, proceeded upstream, seemingly none the worse for its temporary captivity. Notes of the exact date of the bird's capture were mislaid.

Mr. Pierle says he recalls that a Loon was brought to him at about the same time in the fall of 1940, which also was released in the river.

Mr. Russell DeGarmo, assistant in the Game Management Division's Pittman-Robertson program, reports that on November 6, 1941, he watched a single Least Tern, Sterna antillarum, flying above the Great Kanawha river within the city limits of Charleston. He previously has been well acquainted with the species and says he watched the bird reported under advantageous circumstances.

---J. W. Handlan
409 41st Street
Charleston, W. Va.

CROWS ON THE OHIO RIVER

At the Tuesday evening gatherings and the month-end regular meetings of the Brooks Bird Club, the subject of Crows frequently forms part of the conversations. In a recent issue of THE REDSTART, Charles Conrad, one of our best observers outlined some of his studies of this bird and its flocking tendencies. The following paragraphs may add a bit to his data.

It is occasionally the writer's privilege to use the railroad which parallels the upper end of the Ohio River for some distance in the northern panhandle. Many times, especially in the early morning, Crows have been observed feeding along the banks of this stream. Large flocks are never seen along the river at feeding time but the birds, singly and in groups of two to ten are strung along both banks of the river. Several mornings, my observations have been made over distances of thirty miles. At no point were the birds missing for more than a few feet.

Of particular interest and attraction are the Crows when ice has formed along the edges of the stream. What these birds can find on the ice on which to feed, the writer does not know. But he can say from personal observation that the Crows must find something. The ice, whether along the banks or covering the entire stream, is dotted with black birds each morning.

This "Ice-feeding" habit of the Crows is of particular note for another reason. As stated, large numbers of these birds feed along the banks of the stream during the flocking season (the entire year with the exception of that period commonly called the "breeding season"). If normally the Crows find sufficient food along the river banks, what is it that attracts them out on to the surface of the ice during those few days of the year when there is ice on the river. If birds are the creatures of habit that they are reputed to be, what force is it that causes them to walk on to the ice in search of food?

Surely it could not be that the frozen water has brought some food materials to the surface. If this were true a similar condition would exist along the stream banks where the frozen ground would seem to offer a more profitable source of income in the way of food.

Or is there something in the nature of the Crow that gives him the desire to disport himself on "thin ice" much in the manner of a little boy and that the matter of food in the case is of a secondary nature? It seems to be true that no other species of bird is associated with the Crow in this manner of obtaining breakfast so one is inclined to wonder if it is food that brings the Crow onto the river ice or if there is some other attraction?

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