



The Redstart

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Charles Conrad, Editor

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A SUNDAY MORNING WALK

by

John W. Handlan

About one mile west of St. Albans, West Virginia, State Route No. 17 leaves the main highway between Charleston and Huntington to follow the great Kanawha river as it leaves Kanawha county and drops slowly through Putnam and Mason counties to join the Ohio river at Point Pleasant.

Between the mouth of Scary creek and Winfield, the Putnam county seat, Route 17 passes through an area of numerous back-water sloughs created by Federal dams on the Kanawha and several swamp-pond areas fed by small, spring-fed streams.

Into this area on May 8, 1943, three of us went "birding", Mrs. Polly Handlan, Russell DeGarmo, and the writer visited the area to check reports of the presence of nesting Wood Ducks. Mr. DeGarmo, chief of the game management division of the Conservation Commission, had, in 1942, found numerous adults and at least two broods of young Wood Ducks in the area. Our party failed to locate any ducks on May 8, but we thoroughly enjoyed our four hours afield in an area utterly unlike any other in the general vicinity of our residences at Charleston.

Most of our time was spent at a narrow pond, perhaps a third of a mile in length, which was in the open fields for about half its length and wound about in second-growth woods in its upper half. Red-wings, generally uncommon near Charleston, were literally everywhere in the open portion of the pond and we saw at least one nest under construction in the swamp vegetation. Killdeer walked about the pond margins and several Solitary Sandpipers betrayed their presence by flight as we approached them.

Kingbirds chattered from vantage posts along the highway nearby, an Orchard Oriole (our first of the year) sang briefly in a small tree along the road, and Chats and Yellowthroats called from the brushy pasture above the pond. Song Sparrows were "everywhere", and Field Sparrows were almost as numerous.

With the exception that we saw no herons and detected no rails, the birds we saw and heard seemed typical of any swamp area. We "looked twice" at every bird, so to speak, for we all realized that if the Prothonotary Warbler ever is to be found in West Virginia it likely will be located in just such a spot as that in which we were.

But to leave that part of the pond in the open, to traverse the few yards where the first scattered trees began and, finally, to enter the woodland area in which half of the pond lay, was to enter another ornithological world.

Tennessee Warblers, the first we had recorded this year, "chipped" loudly away throughout the woods. Redstarts flashed from tree to tree. We watched Blue-gray Gnatcatchers enter and leave what seemed a complete nest. Wood-thrushes were all about us and we ultimately saw one at a newly-built nest. Then, from close at hand, an Olive-backed Thrush observed this Sunday morning with its beautiful hymn.

We crossed the swamp "top" of the pond on fallen logs, drier tussocks of vegetation and patches of mud flat.

Now we were near the rise of a brushy pasture, leading to heavy woodlands on a gentle slope above. Golden-winged Warblers sang regularly, the smoothly ascending songs of the Cerulean Warbler and the rise and abrupt end of the Parula Warbler's song came again and again. Chestnut-sides diligently went about their undistinguished singing, among numerous other wood warbler choristers.

Out in the open again, on our circuit of the pond, we heard what to this writer is one of the most pleasant of all bird voices - the so-called covey call of the Bob-white.

Within a short period of time and an exceptionally short distance we had visited three distinct bird habitats - open marshland and pond, a woodland pond, and a brushy hill pasture. We didn't find the object of our quest - the Wood Ducks. But we did have a pleasant morning afield, recorded a number of species for the first time this year and - more important - enjoyed ourselves and felt refreshed at a distinct departure from our respective daily jobs.

There were "dividends", too! For example, we saw the largest, longest-stemmed violets any of us had seen along the woodland pond margins. On a partially dried mud patch we found the perfectly preserved foot prints of a very large raccoon. From a distance we listened to the sound of a country church bell - a note which seemed to fit in well with the natural music all about us on this Sunday morning.

--409 41st Street, S. E.,
Charleston, W. Va.

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL EVENT

The 1943 Brooks Bird Club Foray has in every respect proven a great success. Not only has this been expressed by many of the campers, but, still is, in the numerous letters sent the Club. In addition, as the various reports are

being assembled and prepared for the Foray Report, all again substantiate this fact.

Progress can be definitely reported in compiling the 1943 Foray Report and we can assure you it will be ready for distribution at Reunion time. In the event you do not attend the reunion, or it is impossible to hold one this year, your copy of the Report will be mailed to you.

The Brooks Bird Club want to thank each and every one of the Foray members for making this year's Foray a success.

—Charles Conrad
1206 Warwood Avenue
Wheeling, W. Va.

BIRD NOTES

Somewhere in India:-

It has been a good while since I have written a letter addressed to the Club, but that does not mean that I have not been thinking of all of you often and wishing that you might all be able to make a Foray over the route I have taken and the places I have been. But, of course, not under the same circumstances.

You would have had the opportunity to observe the Wandering Albatross for hours and days as they sailed gracefully over and around our ship with no effort. I never seemed to tire of watching them, although an hour or two was the longest I ever had at one time to observe them.

I was able to identify a number of birds after stopping at a library in one of the ports we visited. We also saw schools of flying fish which fooled me at first for I thought they were small birds skimming the water. I miss my binoculars and wish that I could find some bird books.

Since arriving in India I have run into all kinds of new birds. Again I am pretty much of a loss for identification but as soon as I find a field book, I'll go to work. You can't help me much on this score, but I've received a letter and a couple of postcards from you, and believe me, they do help. So keep it up and I will drop a line now and then when I can.

—Master Sgt. Harold J. Bergner
Somewhere in India

Some Bird Enemies of the Army Worm

During July and August, 1942, fall army "worms" (*Laphygama frugiperda*) appeared in a meadow at my home. Practically all vegetation in the field was destroyed.

Hundreds of birds eventually began destroying the caterpillars. Among the concentration of birds in the field the following species were observed, in the order listed, eating the caterpillars: Bob-white, Phoebe, Crow, Bewick's Wren, Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Bluebird, Hooded Warbler, Meadowlark, Baltimore Oriole, Orchard Oriole, Cardinal, Towhee and Field Sparrow.

There were greater numbers of Meadowlarks than any other species. Three Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were noted.

Thanks are due Professor M. G. Brooks, West Virginia University, for identifying the caterpillars.

—H. C. Legg
Nicholas County
Mt. Lookout, West Virginia

Bewick's Wren and Henslow's Sparrows noted near St. Clairsville, Ohio:—

Past records of the occurrence of Bewick's Wren (*Thyromanes bewicki*) and Henslow's Sparrow (*Passerherbulus henslowi*) in the Wheeling region have not been numerous, so the appearance of these birds at St. Clairsville, (Belmont County) Ohio may be of interest to the readers of THE REDSTART.

Bewick's Wren - On July 26, 1942 the writer visited the Daley farm which is located two miles east of St. Clairsville and within sight of U. S. 40. The farmhouse is on high ground and a pair of Bewick's Wrens were seen in the garden. They did not appear to be nesting at that time and no song was heard but some scolding notes attracted attention to them. I have several records for this wren in Belmont County and in each case the birds have been on the hill-tops or at least have been on high ground; never have I found them in the valleys that the Carolina Wren likes so well. Several nests have been located and all of them have been in sheds or outbuildings and each nest has been placed on a horizontal timber!

Henslow's Sparrow - * Hicks makes no mention of the Henslow's Sparrow nesting in Belmont County, but there are definite reasons for believing that it does. The writer saw a singing male near Morristown several years ago. The habitat was a hay field along Egypt creek. At the above-mentioned Daley farm on July 26, 1942, no less than four singing Henslow's Sparrows were noted in one field. The habitat was an old field along the crest of a hill. This habitat checks closely to that generally chosen in the Cleveland area where Henslow's Sparrows are locally fairly common. Each bird was giving his "fle-sic" call from a high, dead weed with regular intervals that soon made the notes monotonous. Lack of time prevented a search for nests but it would not be surprising to the writer if Henslow's Sparrows were to be found nesting as the above birds gave every evidence of being four male birds defending territories in a breeding colony. Old dry fields are definitely their preferred habitat as indicated by my records.

* "Distribution of the Breeding Birds of Ohio" Ohio Biological Survey
Bulletin 32-1935

—H. B. Skaggs
South Euclid
Cleveland, Ohio

B. B. C. MAIL BAG

From the last of April to the last of June, a number of letters were received from members of the Armed Forces and from corresponding members on the home front.

Bob Bonenberger who was hospitalized at the time his letter was written in late April, still observed the birds. He wrote, "There are any number of Sea and Herring Gulls around here and then at night-fall I've been hearing a "Hoot" Owl almost nightly. (I mean Screech Owl)."

From Nichols General Hospital, Kentucky, came these lines written by Army Nurse Elizabeth Hunter, "Dear B. B. cer's, It is a little difficult to find words to express how I felt after receiving your "round-robin". Guess I'll just have to borrow from Robert Browning and say that there is a part of me that is forever B. B. C. I'd forego lunch any time to read a letter like that. These first three weeks at N. G. H. have whizzed by and yet it seems years since Wheeling, Home, mustard plasters at O. V. H. and those "sunny" Sunday hikes. Are you all hiking weekly and planning a Decoration Day spree?"

Walter Ammon stationed at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, tells us of some very interesting observations. "At present I'm sitting under a large Black Oak surrounded by many smaller Winged and American Elms, White Ash, and Hawthorne iaphigi and in the midst of a carpet of Poison Ivy, in which I find, come the dawn, I have slept all night. Birds are quite plentiful, Red-eyes, Mocking-birds, Killdeer, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, Night Hawks, Sparrow, Cooper's and Sharpshinned Hawks, to mention only a few that I've either seen or heard last night and this morning. I think I saw a Road Runner though it was going so fast that all I saw was a long neck and tail with a blur in between."

George Flouer now stationed at Lakehurst, N. J., writes, "I was placed on Mess Duty for a month so I can study up on Physica, Algebra, Trig., and Logistic's which I never had. Go to school with Waves and Marines and more are coming later. We're at a former rich boys' school set in a pine woods with a lake and swamp. Lots of birds and flowers. Met a bird man who has been seeing a Gyrfalcon here. Crows have different call, may be a Fish Crow."

From Washington, D. C., comes news from Mabel Gorman who says, "Your Foray announcement which just arrived was like a letter from home - and, although I'm quite happy and contented, I do miss news from you-all when I don't receive any. I hope as many people get to the Foray as last year and I know as rip-roaring a time as those who do get there can have, will be had!"

From somewhere in the blue Pacific comes word from Dave McAdam who has this interesting observation to report, "Have you ever seen an animal - part rat - part mongoose? Heinz can brag about their 57 varieties, but you should see these. A light brown body $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 10 inches long. Brown haired tail 4 to 6 inches long. They are about 1/2 inch off the ground and fairly fast."

Another letter from Bob Bonenberger in which he says, "That Sunday walk with you folks shall always serve as one of the highlights of my furlough. I

certainly did enjoy it and the breakfast was 'super'. I wish to express my sincere thanks to all of you for showing me such a grand time."

Polly Brandmiller sends us word from Canfield, Ohio, and opens by saying, "Glad you are having a Foray this year. Sorry I can't be with you. I have been quite interested in watching the Baltimore Orioles in our sour cherry tree. Two males spent nearly all last Sunday morning moving from blossom to blossom and eating something, I don't know what - insects or nectar - perhaps you can enlighten me."

George Flouer favored us with a second letter in May. He wrote, "So tomorrow is Century Day. Hope you go over the top. Think I wouldn't have much trouble here to reach that."

"I find it impossible to attend the 1943 Foray," was included in many of the letters received in June. We always welcome your letters but we certainly hated to see those lines. The Foray gang sang your favorite songs, played your favorite games and tried to fulfill all your requests.

Elizabeth Hunter writes us from Nichols General Hospital, Louisville, Kentucky. She observes, "The Kentucky dawns - sunrises - are beautiful (when it isn't raining). There was a little old mocking-bird (anyone doubt me?) that kept me company almost every morning from 5 to 7. One morning I thought he had overslept but at 5:02 he began - sassy as ever. I'd trade him any day, though, for a couple of Veeries."

Two letters arrived from George Breiding during June. The first brought bad news. George says, "Well, the old Sarge has been laid up in the station hospital since the last part of May. Even now I'm all hunched up on my cot. Naturally the question arises, 'What's wrong with him?' The only thing I know, it's rheumatic fever." In a later letter George sent some interesting field notes which will be published in a later issue.

Byrne Waterman writes us from sunny California, "I am now stationed in what is called the Desert Training Center - California where the temperature goes as high as 125 degrees in the day and drops to about 50 degrees at night. So far the only birds have been Vultures, but some say that Road Runners are present. We have lots of lizards and rattle-snakes, in fact, they are too common."

A V-Mail letter came from M/Sgt. Harold Bergner somewhere in India. He wrote, "It was certainly nice to receive the greetings which you sent. I also received your invitation to attend the 1943 Foray, but do not believe I will be able to make it this year, so be sure and have a good time. As you will note on the return address, I have progress to report this time as I have been promoted to Master Sergeant."

Ted Frankenberg comments on our walks, "From what I've heard you all had anything but a cheerful spring for out-of-door activity. With trips like Pymatuning ruled out for the duration, you will get back to Oglebay more and more, I suppose. And all other forms of back-yard camping". Ted adds this P. S., "I surely do enjoy receiving your letters so keep up the good work."

—Rhys Ritter
Bethlehem
Wheeling, W. Va.