



The Redstart

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WINTER BIRDS OF THE CRANBERRY GLADES, POCAHONTAS COUNTY, W. VA.

by
Worth Randle

For many years the lure of the Cranberry Glades area has attracted ornithologists who have reported unusual associations of northern and southern species and new extensions of southern breeding limits. These records have been made during the warm months, but the inaccessibility of the area in the winter months has left them under cover of snow. After two years of residence and observation in the immediate area, including the winters of 1942-43 and 1943-44, I find that winter also has its share of unpredictables.

The most unpredictable of winter unpredictables is winter itself. In the winters of my experience the maximum depth of snow was under two feet; this year there were four feet, and similar depths have been reported before. The period of snow began with mid-October and lasted through April, with some fall in the first week of May, and was distributed irregularly within that time. This variable weather correlates local vertical migrations into the area from the winter shelter afforded by adjacent valleys 2000 feet below, causing instability in the bird population. However, it is a likely generality that the most constant weather conditions prevail during December, January, and February, the 1944 period with the greatest snowfall, the lowest mean temperatures, and the most continuous cover of snow as indicated by the first year's records of the official Cranberry Glades weather station, and also by my unofficial observations of the year before. Since this was also the quiescent interval in general bird movements, it should give the truest indication of the usual winter bird population and is, therefore, the period which limits the following remarks.

The commonest and most ubiquitous of the permanent resident species was the black-capped chickadee, followed closely in numbers by golden-crowned kinglets, Carolina juncos, winter wrens, and ruffed grouse. Downy woodpeckers,

hairy woodpeckers, brown creepers, and red-breasted nuthatches were regularly recorded, while barred owls and red-tailed hawks and blue jays were often noted. White-breasted nuthatches were commonly found only in the high deciduous elevations above the Glades. The pileated woodpecker, eastern turkey, and raven, were year-around species of frequent occurrence. Less commonly encountered continuous residents were mallard ducks, robins, and song sparrows, seen regularly in small groups. At least 12 mallards stayed through the winter of '43-44 even when the small streams of that area were heavily frozen; they were observed regularly in groves of Crataegus apparently depending on them for part of their food supply.

Tree sparrows were rather common winter residents arriving in late November and staying until mid-April.

As local migrants bluebirds and goldfinches appeared from time to time winging over the Glades to fields just beyond; turkey vultures also soared over occasionally, and crows made infrequent forays from the valleys to look around for food. Fox sparrows were induced by warm late February, 1944, weather to come up into the Glades from their wintering valleys below; and a Caroline wren and several tufted titmice were recorded on warm, clear days along barrier ridges between the Glades and the valleys. A single kingfisher was seen once in January along a snowy, icy stream.

The most surprising discoveries were wintering individuals of three species, Brown thrasher, rusty blackbird, and towhee, and a pair of cardinals. The thrasher was particularly notable since it was a rare bird in the Glades area even in summer. This bird, in good condition, was checked in December and January in the Crataegus and Rosa carolina bordering Little Glade. The rusty blackbird was found in the midst of a January snow in the dense alder surrounding a beaver pond where he was searching for food among submerged leaves in openings afforded by the swampy terrain. He was seen often in this locale through January and February. The towhee, found along a run in a spruce thicket, was apparently of accidental occurrence. The cardinal was also scarce in the area, though probably on a slow increase since the Alleghenian floral invasion following lumbering operations. Of the three pair noted in the Glades vicinity during summer, only one pair remained for winter.

A total of 32 species were recorded:

Mallard Duck, Anas p. platyrhynchos; Turkey Vulture, Cathartes aura septentrionalis; Red-tailed Hawk, Buteo b. borealis; Ruffed Grouse, Bonasa u. umbellus; Turkey, Meleagris gallopavo silvestris; Barred Owl, Strix varia; Belted Kingfisher, Megaceryle a. alcyon; Pileated Woodpecker, Geophleous pileatus; Hairy Woodpecker, Dryobates v. villosus; Downy Woodpecker, Dryobates pubescens medianus; Blue Jay, Cyanocitta c. cristata; Northern Raven, Corvus corax principalis; Eastern Crow, Cervus b. brachyrhynchos; Black-capped Chickadee, Penthestes atricapillus (practicus?); Tufted Titmouse, Baeolophus bicolor; White-breasted Nuthatch, Sitta c. carolinensis; Red-breasted Nuthatch, Sitta canadensis; Brown Creeper, Certhia familiaris (nigrescens?); Winter Wren, Nannus troglodytes pullus?; Carolina Wren, Thryothorus l. ludovicianus; Brown Thrasher, Toxostoma rufum; Robin, Turdus m. migratorius; Bluebird, Sialia s. sialis; Golden-crowned Kinglet, Regulus s. satrapa; Rusty Blackbird, Euphagus carolinus; Cardinal, Richmondia c. cardinalis;

Goldfinch, Spinus t. tristis; Red-eyed Towhee, Pipilo e. erythrophthalmus; Carolina Junco, Junco hyemalis carolinensis; Tree Sparrow, Spizella a. arborea; Fox Sparrow, Passerella i. iliaca; Song Sparrow, Melospiza m. melodia.

--Philadelphia, Pa.

EARLY SPRING MIGRANTS

The Morgantown area, including Suncrest, has emerged from its worst winter in many years. Deep snows were our chief concern. They were serious hazards for the birds as deeply they covered their feeding grounds. We wondered if any of them would weather the almost continuous snow handicaps.

Fortunately many feeding stations were kept in operation in this vicinity. These helped to save much of our bird population. To my own stations came almost daily three covies of bob-white quail, more than thirty in number. Likewise, there were song sparrows, juncos, downy woodpeckers, white-breasted nuthatches, titmice, chickadees, a mockingbird, and too many English sparrows and starlings. A single visit was made by a male ring-necked pheasant.

Spring came earlier than is usual to this vicinity. Despite the bitter winter, migrants began to arrive some several days in advance of their previous yearly recorded dates.

First to come on February first were the mourning doves. Robins appeared at Suncrest on February 12, though they were reported a week earlier in South Park only three miles away.

Next came the red-wings and meadowlarks on February 25. Killdeer and flickers arrived on March 3. A day later, March 4, grackles, woodcocks, field sparrows and phoebes were busy in their usual habitats.

On March 11, the towhees were back, singing atop regular perches. Six days later, March 17, cowbirds on wing were voicing their return in shrill, high-pitched notes.

Sunday, March 17, brought vesper sparrows and the handsome fox sparrows, singing in their respective fields and dense thickets.

To these early returns will be added more and more as days come and go. With earlier-than-usual arrivals, one never knows what bird may turn up over night. Whatever it is, it shall be given a springtime welcome.

--I. B. Boggs
West Virginia University
Morgantown, W. Va.

TEN-SECOND DIVER

On March 19, 1944, Charles Danbach, Bob Hines, and the writer were observing ducks on the Scioto River, near Bellepoint, Delaware county, Ohio. Our attention was attracted to the antics and capers of an American golden-eye duck, Glaucionetta clangula americana. A discussion ensued, with a well known authority on ducks being misquoted as saying golden-eyes when diving stay under water for a period of ten seconds. (Correct time should have been quoted as 21 seconds.) In jest, the authority's statement was questioned and we decided to determine just how long this particular duck was actually submerged. Again and again as ten was counted in rhythm with the second hand, the duck would bob to the surface as if the word ten was a signal for it to reappear. No doubt, other lengths of time, both more and less than ten seconds (also 21 seconds) are taken by this species when diving, nevertheless, we were amused and wondered why all our counts had a ten-second limit. Perhaps the depth of the dive and the amount of food available was the answer.

—Geo. H. Breiding
108 West Woodruff
Columbus, Ohio

A PUGNACIOUS SONG SPARROW

Last Spring, my attention was called by my mother to a song sparrow (Melospiza melodia) that was fighting its reflection in the nickled headlights of a wrecked car in the barn lot. After that, this sparrow was observed every day for about three weeks, when the car was removed. It spent much of the day at the egg-shaped lights fighting its reflection and it was quite amusing to watch it slip and slide on the lights as well as on the rounded enameled fenders as it attempted to gain its footing. It would dart at the light, peck it, drop to the fender, slide to the bottom, fly at the light again ad infinitum. It took time off to sing and feed, of course, but spent approximately half the day at the lights.

Frequently one reads of this sparrow, robins and various other species of birds with this pugnacious trait of fighting their image in a pane of glass, mirror or some other reflecting surface, but in this case, the reflection was a very distorted caricature of the bird due to the shape of the reflecting surface of the headlights. An English sparrow (Passer domesticus) was held at a headlight and one could hardly recognize the reflection as that of a bird. Certainly the species could hardly be recognized. The tip of the bill was small while the back part of it gained in size and the body was a large, bulbous, distorted feather bag. There are strange birds but never as strange a bird as that song sparrow saw and fought in the headlights of that old battered Model A Ford.

—W. C. Legg
Mt. Lookout, W. Va.

BIRD COLLECTING AT CLEAR CREEK, COLORADO

On Saturday, the 16th of December, 1944, Mr. Joe Stevens, of the Colorado Museum of Natural History, and I drove to Clear Creek in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, seven miles north of Denver. While enroute the author observed his first Lewis's Woodpecker. Upon arrival at Clear Creek, we shouldered our guns and proceeded towards the hills. Following is a list of the birds collected with a 38 calibre shot which the museum men make themselves.

Rocky Mountain Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Rocky Mountain Junco, Slate-colored Junco, Black-capped Chickadee, Rocky Mountain Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cassin's Purple Finch.

Other birds positively identified at Clear Creek or enroute were:

Western Meadowlark, Virginia Rail, Robin, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Rocky Mountain Creeper, English Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Bohemian Waxwing, American Magpie.

The weather was clear, with snow on the ground. Temperature ranged from 48 degrees to 50 degrees. The total time spent was from 1:30 p.m. until 4:00 p.m.

--S/Sgt. Robert Bonenberger
Denver, Colorado

AN UNUSUAL SONG OF THE YELLOW-THROAT

Three observers recorded an unusual song of a yellow-throat, Geothlypis trichas, in Putnam county, West Virginia, on May 9, 1943. The incident seems to be sufficiently unusual to merit publication.

Observers were Mrs. Polly Handlan, W. Russell DeGarmo and the writer. Mr. DeGarmo, who is chief of the game management division of the Conservation Commission of West Virginia, in previous years had located swamp sparrows, Melospiza georgiana, in swampy land adjacent to W. Va. Route 17, not far from Winfield, and there the party spent a morning in the field.

Mr. DeGarmo first detected and called attention to a typical swamp sparrow song. The singing bird was close to the road and it was decided to substantiate, by visual evidence, what had been heard. When the bird was seen and watched in the act of singing on at least a dozen occasions, it proved to be a yellow-throat. As it sang its "Swamp Sparrow song", the bird vibrated its wings, after the fashion of young birds waiting to be fed or of birds of various species in the course of courtship.

Upon returning to Charleston, the writer consulted ornithological texts available at home and found only one reference to a similarly deceptive song by a yellow-throat. It is recorded in Forbush (1) as a quotation from the writings of Gerald H. Thayer. It reads:

" 'Like the chestnut-side, it (the yellow-throat) sometimes mocks, or seems to mock, other birds. Queerly enough, in the only case of this I ever was witness to, the bird mimicked was a swamp sparrow, just as with the chestnut-side. The imitation was equally loud and convincing, and was repeated many times; - a long, loud swamp sparrow trill, ending with a few normal witty-titty notes of the yellow-throat song. Like the chestnut-side, too, this bird lived among swamp sparrows. ' "

In the case of the bird heard, and watched, sing, no yellow-throat notes which were detected accompanied a vocal performance which most bird students would unhesitatingly have credited to a swamp sparrow, rather than to the yellow-throat which was responsible for it.

- (1) Forbush, Edward H., "Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States," Vol. III, p. 297, 1929, (Norwood Press, Norwood, Mass.) Contrib. by Maurice Brown.

—John W. Handlan
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