



The Redstart

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AVERAGE HEIGHT AT WHICH BIRDS NEST by Lawrence E. Hicks

From 1924 to 1935 the writer conducted a detailed study of the breeding birds of an 80 acre tract of land near Westerville, 12 miles north of Columbus, Ohio, to obtain data concerning the exact make-up and changes in a sample bird population. The area, partially enclosed by a loop of Alum Creek, was chosen because of its accessibility and because it was considered to be fairly typical of stream valley conditions general in mid-Ohio and frequent elsewhere in the state.

During the study, 224 bird species were identified on the 80 acres, of which 86 species nested. The average number of the nesting species per year was 60.5. The average number of the nesting pairs per year was 219.5 or 2.74 pairs per acre. The nesting of 76% of the pairs was substantiated by the actual finding of the nest (a total of 1664 nests located).

To acquaint one with the chief species and habitats present, the 10 best represented species with the average number of nesting pairs of each nesting per year, were: English Sparrow, 27.9; Mississippi Song Sparrow, 24.2; Eastern Red-Wing, 23.6; Eastern Robin, 8.3; Bobolink, 7.7; Northern Yellow-throat, 6.1; Barn Swallow, 6.0; Eastern Cardinal, 4.9; Alder Flycatcher, 4.8.

Most of the conclusions reached as a result of this study were published in 1935 (*Am. Midland Naturalist* 16:177-186).

Recently, for comparison with some similar studies made by Preston and Norris near Butler, Pennsylvania, the writer has had occasion to average the nest heights for each species as recorded in the original field notes. The nests of certain species are more difficult to locate. Hence, in order to obtain a properly weighted average of the entire population, it is necessary to assume that the 24% of the nests not located,

were placed at the same average heights as those nests of the same species which were located.

The result shows that the 2195 pairs present on the 80-acre tract (1924-33) nested at an average height of 6.2 feet. If the 300 pairs of 3 exotic species are excluded from the data, the average nesting height of native species was only 5.8 feet i.e. about eye-level of most basketball centers. This average nest height is considerably lower than the popular conception of birds typically nesting in the tree-tops.

SPARROWS BREEDING IN A SINGLE LOCALITY IN HAMPSHIRE COUNTY

Just south of Slanesville, Hampshire County, West Virginia, along State Highway No. 45, is an extensive plateau covered with poverty grass (*Danthonia*), broomædge (*Andropogon*), and scrubby black locust. The effect is that of a rolling prairie, in an early stage of shrub invasion.

On a trip through this region in early July, 1946, I was struck by the large number of resident sparrow species in the locality. Notes on these sparrows are as follows:

Ammodramus savannarum. Grasshopper sparrow. Very common throughout the area. Six singing males could be counted from one spot along the highway.

Passerherbulus henslowi. Henslow's sparrow. This species, which has apparently been increasing its range greatly within West Virginia, was found in a somewhat moister and richer area. This small territory had an abundance of orchard grass (*Dactylus glomeratus*), seemingly a favorite cover for these birds in the state. Nearby locusts afforded singing perches.

Pooecetes gramineus. Vesper sparrow. Common throughout the area.

Chondestes grammacus. Lark sparrow. This is a bird of highly fluctuating occurrence in West Virginia, but the present year has seen it seemingly more common than in many years past. The greater number of records in 1946 may, of course, be due to more field work which has been permitted by relaxation of travel restrictions.

A single male was found near Slanesville. The bird was singing from a telephone line. Lark sparrows, in my experience, are likely to advertise themselves by singing from such perches, their very musical notes interspersed with rasping, unmusical calls which are characteristic of the song, and make identification quite easy.

As noted elsewhere in THE REDSTART Dr. D. W. Parsons found an occupied nest of this species in Preston County this summer.

Aimophila aestivalis bachmanii. Bachman's sparrow. This is another species whose occurrence in the state is subject to great fluctuation. As has been many times recorded, the birds first appeared in West Virginia around 1900, became common and widespread by 1920, but had almost completely disappeared by 1930. In recent years they have again been on the increase, and have invaded the part of the state east of the Alleghenies, where they were uncommon or unknown during the previous invasion. Miss Serena K. Dandridge, of Shepherdstown informs me (in correspondence) that Bachman's sparrows are now quite common on her farm in Jefferson County, the birds, locally at least, seeming to be as abundant as are field sparrows.

From a careful study of the earlier invasion the conclusion is inescapable that the birds on that occasion reached West Virginia from the south and west, checking their movement at the high Allegheny ridges. The present invasion of the territory east of the mountains suggests that the birds may have moved up the Shenandoah Valley, a conclusion that is strengthened by the fact that there have been a number of recent reports of the birds in the Valley south of West Virginia.

In the Slanesville region two singing males were noted, both of them at the borders of groves of walnut trees which stood near the brushy grassland.

Spizella passerina. Chipping sparrow. A common bird throughout the area.

Spizella pusilla. Field sparrow. Probably the most abundant sparrow in the region.

Melospiza melodia. Common in the dense vegetation along highway ditches and culverts.

I cannot recall another situation in West Virginia where one is likely to find eight sparrows within a single small area.

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

FIELD TRIP TO CADIZ, OHIO

The regular spring field trip to the Cadiz territory was made on Sunday, March 24, 1946. Two carloads of Brooks Bird Club members made up the party from Wheeling, W. Va. and upon reaching our point in Ohio we were joined by a number of Cadizites. This year

as in former years, the prime interest and reason for the trip was to observe the water and shore birds of this area. Observations were made at Tappan, Piedmont, and Clendenning dams in the Cadiz vicinity; six hours in the field. Results were not too gratifying, since only 33 species of birds were listed, 11 of them water fowl.

It was the opinion of both groups that two things could have been responsible for the lack of ducks -- one, the increased number of fishermen; two, the improvement of a state highway which necessitated the lowering of the water in the dam and left high mudflats. This should increase the shore bird population in mid-May. Our list showed nothing unusual but the Cadiz group promised to keep a close watch during April with the hopes that a more favorable report would be forthcoming. The following is a composite list of the species recorded for the day in Harrison County, Ohio:

Common Loon
Canada Goose
Mallard
Common Black Duck
Canvas-back
Baldpate
Scaup duck
Blue-winged Teal
Hooded Merganser
American Merganser
Turkey Vulture
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Sparrow Hawk
Killdeer
Herring Gull
Mourning Dove
Flicker
Downy Woodpecker
Phoebe
Horned Lark
Eastern Crow
Chickadee
Bluebird
Robin
Starling
English Sparrow
Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird
Cowbird
Field Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow

-- Dorothy Conrad
423 Warwood Avenue
Wheeling, W. Va.

ORNITHOLOGICAL MEETINGS

After a lapse of some years during the recent World War, the national ornithological societies are again holding meetings in 1946.

The American Ornithologists' Union met at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, on September 2-5, 1946. The meeting was widely attended, and was notable for the number of papers dealing with birds of out-of-the-way corners of the world, many of them resulting from observations made possible by the accidents of military service. A group of three papers dealt with some problems of bird distribution in the Appalachian region. These were given by George Petrides, now of Ohio State University, Eugene Odum, of the University of Georgia, and the writer.

Lawrence Hicks spoke on the occurrence of western races of the nighthawk in Ohio, and on the evening grosbeak invasion during the winter of 1945-46. He included observations on these birds made near Huntington, W. Va.

The Wilson Ornithological Club will hold its first meeting since 1941 at Lincoln, Nebraska, on November 28-30, 1946. Special attention at this meeting will be given to birds of the grasslands. A feature will be an exhibit of paintings and drawings of ornithological subjects made by men and women who served in the armed forces of the United States and Canada, and whose military duties took them to little known and seldom visited parts of the world. William Lunk, who spent three years in the remote mountain sections of Hawaii, will show some of the water colors of Hawaiian birds which he made on the spot.

It is to be hoped that members of the Brooks Bird Club will be able to attend this meeting.

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

NOTE ON PROTHONOTARY WARBLERS

On May 19, 1946, Alice Kingman and Margarete Morse visited Aurora (Pond) Lake and were pleasantly surprised to see two Prothonotary Warblers at close range. The species is quite rare in the Cleveland area although there are previous records and J. W. Aldrich reported a breeding pair at Aurora Pond several years ago.

On hearing of the May 19th record, Mrs. Skaggs and I were very anxious to see the warblers so we visited the same location on

May 25 with Miss Morse as our guide. We had scarcely reached the edge of a stagnant water section of the lake that was rather thickly dotted with stumps and dead trees, this being characteristic prothonotary habitat, when I recognized a song of the prothonotary warbler. The song may be described as being somewhat like that of the swamp sparrow but with a buzzy tone. Usually six syllables, but sometimes five or seven, the song sounds like "zwheet-zweet-zweet-zweet-zweet-zweet" or "sweet-sweet-sweet-etc.", with all syllables on the same key.

After a little while, we were able to locate one of the singing birds perched on a dead stub about 100 feet out in the lake. From the songs we judged that there were two or perhaps three singing birds, probably males, and we are hoping that they found mates and that the birds will nest there.

Aurora Lake is located in Portage County and is well within the 30 mile radius from the Cleveland Public Square, this being the area designated as the Cleveland Area for bird records. The above record is the writer's first for the prothonotary warbler in north-eastern Ohio.

-- Merit B. Skaggs
2066 Alton Road
East Cleveland.

PROTHONOTARY WARBLERS NEST IN THE CLEVELAND, OHIO AREA

On June 22, Frank Simpson and the writer visited Aurora Lake for the purpose of finding out whether or not the above mentioned warblers remained to breed. The answer was an emphatic "yes".

Obtaining a boat, we gradually worked our way out to the place where the male birds had been singing in May and soon heard and saw a singing male prothonotary warbler. A few minutes later we saw a female that acted as if it were feeding young. However, it was the male that showed us where a young bird was by flying to a small willow where a young bird was perched about three feet above the water. Although the young bird was mostly grayish there was definite yellowish tinge to the head and throat. The baby bird was silent except for a begging sound uttered when the parent was about to feed it. About thirty feet away we soon found another juvenile, this one only about 18 inches above the water and being fed by the female of the pair.

We did not find any more young but believe that this is the first time that young birds have been noted in the area. From the age of the birds we estimated that the eggs were laid about May 30th.

-- Merit B. Skaggs

FIELD NOTES

Lark Sparrow

I wish to report the finding of a nest of a Lark Sparrow in a pasture hillside near Fellowsville, W.Va., on June 19, 1946. There was one young in the nest. The male bird attracted attention by a constant display of the white areas in its tail.

-- D. W. Parsons
W.V.U.
Morgantown, W. Va.

House Wren

In the backyard of my home I have erected on a pole over the grape arbor a wren house which has been occupied yearly. Several days ago (May 14, 1942) my father called to my attention a very interesting situation. The neighbors next door had left a spool of very fine light blue twine hanging on a nail which was in the fence post. The wren apparently decided to use at least one piece of this material in the nest, for here is what occurred. The thread which was easily unwound was stretched over to our yard, across the walk, atop the grape arbor and up to the wren house. About thirty feet of the twine was unwound.

-- Charles Conrad
Warwood,
W. Va.

Philadelphia Vireo

One of the most important birds listed during fall migration of 1937 in the Wheeling Area was the Philadelphia Vireo Philadelphicus. It was a new species to most of us and was identified, pointed out and collected by Dr. George Sutton. The size is about the same as the other vireos (book measurements is five inches which makes it the smallest of the group). It has a dark greenish back, wings and tail; a greenish-yellow belly with an indistinct white line over the eye. One of the outstanding things was the great numbers in which they appeared. For several days it was the most abundant bird in the woodlands at Oglebay Park. It was also recorded at Bethany and Beech Bottom, W. Va.

-- Charles Conrad
Warwood,
W. Va.