



# The Redstart

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BULL'S ISLAND IN JANUARY, 1947

by

Virginia G. Cavendish

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Always I have wanted to go on one of the Audubon Wildlife Tours, so when I received a folder in the fall singing a siren's song of Bull's Island I decided this was my golden opportunity; so I signed up at once - and I and my friend from Providence were the last reservations for the season. Mr. Sprunt and a brand new beach wagon - the old one fell to pieces, he explained! - met us at the St. John's Hotel bright and early the first day of the tour and we drove twenty - five miles up the shore beyond Charleston to a landing, where the motor boat from the Island met us and ferried us through a winding channel between mud flats and oyster banks over to the Island. On the way, we saw willets, flocks of oyster-catchers, with their red bills all turned into the sun, sanderlings, knots, dowitchers, yellow-legs, and the swift flight of black-bellied plovers. Cormorants and kingfishers were perched motionless on stakes in the channel and boat-tailed grackles swung on the reeds along the shore. Ring-billed gulls followed our boat and mergansers drew their horizontal flight-lines along the little indentations of the marshy shore.

Bull's Island is a barrier island, with the ocean on the east and the famous "Inland Passage" between it and the main shore. It was at one time a rice plantation, but for some years now has belonged to the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior. The old plantation house now makes extremely comfortable quarters for the Audubon Wildlife tourists, and the delightful young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Moffett, who are the care-takers of the Island, supplied our creature comforts in a manner entirely satisfactory to everyone present. The Island is covered with a thick stand of ilex, heavy with its startling red fruits when we were there, live oaks, hung with Spanish moss, palmetto, southern pine and magnolias, through which dense growth wild turkeys slip like shadows, fox squirrels chase through the tree-tops and deer meet you face to face on the old trails. Pileated woodpeckers keep up a constant drumming in the far woods, and palm warblers make their sweet music all day long.

The first morning, we went down to the dam that holds back the fresh water marshes, and there we saw more ducks than I knew existed in the world. They were there by the thousands, feeding on the banana-lily and other delicacies spread for them there by the wildlife service - pintails, mallards, blue and green-winged teal, redheads, canvas-backs, ruddies, buffleheads, ring-necks, baldpates, scaups, shovellers, the gorgeous wood ducks and the shy black ducks. Feeding with them were coots, grebes, and gallinules; clapper rails hid in the rushes, with their eerie call a sure identification; great blue herons stood like statues in the marshes; short-billed marsh wrens and swamp sparrows flitted through the dense growth along the edge of the water, and the familiar brown thrasher sang by the patch. As we came back along the sand flats, marsh hawks, with their characteristic white rump patch, flew low over the tall grass, one with an unwary young crow in his claws. Red-winged blackbirds swung in the cattails, and loons made the marshes resound with their hoarse cries. Young bald eagles hovered on motionless wings and black and turkey vultures wheeled overhead.

In the afternoon, we walked over to the ocean and watched gannets, great white birds with black wing-tips, as they fished along the shore waves, dropping like plummet, with a great splash, when they saw fish below them. The white wings of Forster's and Caspian terns glittered in the sunlight as they circled off shore, and against the far horizon several brown pelicans flew in single file about their important business.

In the morning of the second day, the truck took us up to the northern end of the island where a dam separated the salt marshes from the fresh water marshes, and again we were able to watch thousands of ducks as they fed quietly on the still water. Pintails made such amusing exclamation points as they tip-tilted for food, and grebes were there - and then they weren't! At the first indication of our presence on the shore, the air was full of the rush of wings as the wary ducks flew off in alarm, thus giving us an excellent chance to study their flight patterns. We learned to know the fresh-water ducks from those which frequent salt-water by their method of getting off the water: the fresh-water species lift almost straight up from the water, while the salt-water species patter along the surface of the water for some distance before they take off.

Mr. Sprunt showed us a great horned owl on its nest, and we were able to watch it for some time before it became alarmed and flew off through the trees. A couple of porpoises had found their way up through the channels of water from the sea and were playing unconcernedly only a few feet from shore, in imminent danger of being stranded by the receding tide. They were so near we could see the texture of their skin and hear them "blow" as they came to the surface after rooting in the muck for whatever food they were after. There were numbers of great blue herons along the marshes here, with a few little blues for company. Towhees were calling and bluebirds and goldfinches were everywhere. Golden and ruby-crowned kinglets were flashing through the low trees beyond the marshes, Savannah sparrows were in the underbrush, white-throats called in the distance, and cardinals made bright flashes against the pines.

That afternoon we took a last walk up toward the salt marshes again, and saw the same Arkansas kingbird that Mr. Sprunt had spotted two walks before - much like a crested flycatcher, with a nice yellow breast. We heard the white-eyed vireo call up there - the first time Mr. Sprunt had heard it on the Island this winter - and we found quite a flock of purple finches, with such vivid coloring on their backs that we had trouble identifying them at first. A red-shouldered

hawk flew overhead, mourning doves called softly, cedar waxwings flocked through the trees, myrtle warblers, yellow-throated and pine warblers were there in great numbers, and sharp-tailed sparrows were identified by their buffy face patches. Other birds that we saw at various times were phoebes, Carolina wrens, song sparrows, juncos, purple grackles, yellow-throats, shrikes, mockingbirds, flickers, hairy and downy woodpeckers, house wrens, and both common and fish crows.

It was with much regret that we climbed aboard the boat for the trip back to town late the second afternoon. It was a most interesting two days and Mr. Sprunt proved to be the perfect leader for such a trip. He knew his birds and gave instantaneous identifications that were very helpful. It is a trip that everyone interested in birds should take sooner or later.

Huntington, W. Va.

#### QUAIL TRAPPING IN NICHOLAS COUNTY

During January and February, 1947, it was necessary for me to trap twenty-five to fifty quail (Colinus virginianus) of pure native stock to be used for research purposes. Considering the general scarcity of this species, particularly in the more mountainous counties (where, it is believed, one is more likely to find larger and sturdier birds), the main problem, it seemed, was to locate suitable covies. Game Protectors in widely scattered parts of the state were contacted to determine where quail trapping might be most speedily and successfully done. Since Mr. Willard Willey of Nicholas County appeared to be the most optimistic in regard to such a project, it was decided to investigate that area first.

With the help of Mr. Willey, I was able within a few weeks to locate five or six covies of quail which, so far as could be determined, had never been in contact with pen-reared stock and were, therefore, eligible for capture. All the covies existed at altitudes approaching 2000 feet. A total of four farms were involved and the owners were found to be cooperative.

Three of the four farms adjoin and may be considered a unit. Broadly speaking, farming practices on these lands favor the quail, though contemplated changes will affect them adversely. These changes involve the eradication of fence-row growth and the creation of new pasture land. The principal crops the past year were corn and buckwheat. The three farms comprise about 250 acres of which about one-fifth is young oak-hickory growth with a liberal sprinkling of hemlock and rhododendron. About one-half of the cleared land is unused and unpastured. This idle land, being covered with various grasses, sumac, greenbrier, broomsedge, and weeds, was the source of most quail food and cover and was the territory most frequented by the covies.

Another factor of importance in making this good quail habitat was the presence of several rail fences having a five to fifteen foot border on either side of sassafras, greenbrier, sumac, blackberry, wild grape, and various weeds, and grasses.

At least ten house cats and twelve dogs habitually roamed the area. A sharp-shinned hawk (Accipiter striatus velox) was seen several times near one bait site, and, it is believed, on one occasion kept quail from the grain for three consecutive days. (Handley's description of quail reactions to the presence of an Accipiter is most interesting.)

The fourth farm, on which a ten-bird covey was trapped, comprised a rectangular block of about seventy-five acres of cleared land, surrounded on three sides by a nearly mature oak-hickory forest containing some hemlock and rhododendron. The principal crop was corn and the landowner had left a few rows standing in order to help the birds during the winter. Quail utilized it occasionally during November, December, and January, but at the approach of snowy, zero weather in early February were not seen near the grain, possibly because it was steadily in use by crows at that time. Most of the fields were not farmed during 1946 and the resultant crop of weeds formed the major portion of the quail food and cover.

Standard Stoddard traps painted a neutral color were used in the operations. Traps of this type are three feet square, one foot deep, constructed of hardware cloth, and have on one side a funnel-like entrance designed to permit entry of the birds but prevent their escape.

During January, after the covies had been located, bait sites were established at fencerow intersections and in brushy or weedy swales. When a covey was known to have fed on the scratch grain at one place, the other bait spots within range of that covey were abandoned. This was intended to restrict their movements as much as possible. January was so mild, however, that the birds paid little attention to the grain because natural food was easy to obtain.

The first week in February witnessed the beginning of severe snowstorms, and the quail reacted in a manner which indicated they were aware of the existence of the grain put out for them. The traps had been propped up sufficiently high on one end to permit easy access to the grain and to allow the birds to become accustomed to their presence. On the second day of the storm all covies which had been baited had visited the traps, gone under them and eaten freely of the grain. The quail were now "ready" to be trapped and the lowering of one or two traps per day, to suit our convenience, resulted in the capture of virtually all the birds in each covey within a week. With the exception of one small covey, all the birds appeared large and healthy.

Minor sidelights to the trapping process were the capture of a cottontail rabbit along with a covey of four quail, and the entry to one of the traps of a sparrow hawk (Falco sparverius) which killed one cardinal (Richmondia cardinalis), one junco (Junco hyemalis), one song sparrow (Melospiza melodia), and one quail, consuming the head and neck of each. The hawk was released. The cottontail had so badly chewed the buffer (a strip of burlap one inch below the top of the trap which prevents trapped birds from injuring themselves as they attempt to fly out) that the trap had to be cut to pieces in order to remove the quail. A list of the various covies and the weights of individual birds follows:

Covey #1			#2		#3		#4	
Band No.	Sex	Ozs.						
6507	M	7.04	6518	F 6.40	6531	F 6.24	6521	F 5.60
6504	F	6.72	6517	M 6.40	6532	M 7.04	6510	M 5.12
6506	M	6.40	6505	F 8.00	6524	M 6.88	6522	F 5.92
6502	F	6.08	6515	F 7.52	6528	F 6.24	6520	M 5.44
6503	M	6.56	6516	F 6.72	6526	M 6.08		
6501	M	7.04	6513	F 7.68	6530	M 6.08		
6511	M	6.40	6509	F 7.52	6525	M 5.76		
			6514	F 7.04	6527	F 6.40		
			6508	M 6.72	6529	F 5.92		
			6519	F 6.40				
			6523	F 6.88				

Covey #1	#2	#3	#4
5 males	2 males	5 males	2 males
2 females	9 females	4 females	2 females

Total number of males: 14. Average weight: 6.35 oz.

Total number of females: 17. Average weight: 6.66 oz.

In these figures two things of interest are seen: 1) A sex ratio in favor of the females\* which indicates a stable, if not an ascending population. 2) The females averaged greater in weight than the males. Since they were weighed an hour or two after capture, it may be that the hens, for some reason, had glutted more on the grain than the cocks.

The trapping also clearly demonstrated to me how easy it would be on every farm for quail to be fed in winter during hazardous weather such as occurred during February and March of 1947. If such were to be done for quail where they exist, undoubtedly, a worthwhile increase in population would result. Such feeding should always be conducted near heavy cover so as to prevent predation and to enable bob-whites to "hole up" between short trips for food. During continued snows a feed shelter is almost indispensable. Feed should be placed under the shelter sometime in November to allow the birds plenty of time to locate it and, of course, the supply should be replenished as often as necessary. If the grain should become wet it should be hoed under or disposed of in some manner for when soured it will often make quail sick. Either scratch grain or cracked corn seems ideal for food, although buckwheat, wheat, oats, barley, or any cereal grain will suffice.

R. Wayne Bailey  
Charleston, W. Va.

\*Mr. Roger M. Latham of Pennsylvania informs me by letter that in his sex-differential work on quail he found the male to be capable of enduring more cold and starvation than the female. Thus, in spring the sex ratio is often in favor of the males. Stoddard in Georgia found there is generally an excess of males in late winter.

#### PYMATUNING REPORT - 1947

Due to the fact that Easter Sunday came on the first weekend in April, the annual field trip to Pymatuning Lake was moved up to the weekend of March 29-30. In the years past this last weekend in March usually proved to be about the best for waterfowl migration. However, I cannot say that this held true this year as the thirty some members of the Brooks Bird Club who were present at Linesville only compiled a total of 55 species. Although a small total (102 in 1946) most of us were well satisfied because of the species we did record.

Most of us on our way to Linesville, Pa. encountered quite a bit of snow both on the ground and in the air. On Friday night, March 28, in most of north-eastern Ohio and Western Pennsylvania a blizzard was experienced which left high drifts of snow and from four to six inches over most of the country side. Then at Linesville on Saturday night it snowed another two or three inches. The temperature ranged from about 22° to 40° and most of the time a strong wind was encountered. As for the lake it was frozen over except for open spots along the shore line and a few in the distance. All the ponds and swamps, such as Hartstown, were frozen solid. So, as a result, we had to travel for open water, and most of our birding was done from the car. Several groups did go out after breakfast on Sunday morning on foot and covered the territory at the Linesville end of the lake.

On Saturday afternoon as we left Andover and drove along the spillway, it was the writer's good fortune to spot two birds which proved to be snow buntings Plectrophenox nivalis. Most all of the group during our stay got to observe these birds. On the same afternoon members of the Columbus group recorded one lone European widgeon Mareca penelope. There are not too many records of this species at Pymatuning.

On Sunday morning most of our group had the pleasure of seeing some 18 whistling swans Cygnus columbianus. They reported sighting the swans in perfect formation and seeing them turn and make a graceful landing on the water. Most of the same group of people observed a lone bald eagle Haliaeetus leucocephalus at considerable distance.

Several comments are in order before listing the total species recorded. First, we did go to Pymatuning to observe water birds and we recorded 26 species. Second, although 90% of the lake was frozen, we were all satisfied with the density of ducks. Third, most of us had a better opportunity than usual to observe the ducks at close range with the open water mostly at the shore line. Fourth, most of us added a new bird to our life lists with the snow bunting. Fifth, an unusually great number of red-breasted mergansers Mergus serrator were present. And last but not least, we did have a good time. As usual, headquarters was at the Travelers' Hotel. In case you have not been there since it was remodeled, you have a treat in store. It must be seen to be appreciated. We recommend the meals, the refreshments, and the hospitality anytime.

On Saturday evening the feature of the program was colored moving pictures of birds of Pennsylvania which were shown and commented upon by our good member, Leroy Black. In addition to "Blackie" were Mrs. Black, Harold and Rachel Olsen, George and Janie Breiding, Ed and Bernice Dowler, Chuck and Kay Conrad, Mr. and Mrs. Diemer, Mr. and Mrs. Hughes Barnes, Mary Jones, Libby Etz, Carolyn Conrad, Marilyn Jones, Julian Dusi, Frank Connors, Bob Lehman, Nick Flourer, Clyde Upton.

The compiled list as recorded by the above members was as follows: common loon, great blue heron, whistling swan, Canada goose, mallard, black duck, gadwall, baldpate, European widgeon, pintail, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, shoveller, redhead, ring-necked duck, canvas-back, scaup, American golden-eye, bufflehead, ruddy duck, hooded merganser, American merganser, red-breasted merganser, turkey vulture, sharp-shinned hawk, red-tailed hawk, bald eagle, marsh hawk, sparrow hawk, ringed-necked pheasant, coot, killdeer, herring gull, ring-billed gull, hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, horned lark, blue jay, crow, chickadee, tufted titmouse, robin, bluebird, starling, English sparrow, meadow lark, red-wing, grackle, cowbird, cardinal, goldfinch, slate-colored junco, tree sparrow, song sparrow and snow bunting.

Charles Conrad  
Wheeling, W. Va.

#### FIELD NOTES

On Saturday, April 5, 1947, Russell DeGarmo and the writer spent the entire day in the field, or the hours from 8:00 A.M. until 5:15 P.M. Our main objective was to cover the Tappan Dam water area, however, before the day was over we had made the circle of Tappan, Piedmont, Clendennin and back to Tappan dam. On the connecting roadways we stopped whenever and where ever a bird crossed our course. At the end of the day we had recorded 47 species of birds. The weather was moderate and cloudy with about an hour of rain in the late morning. There was a constant wind most of the day and the temperature was 40°.

Most of the water birds we observed were on the Tappan waters with only five species at Piedmont and one at Clendennin. The water level at all the lakes was high, and many flocks of ducks could be observed but too far distant to be identified.

The number of species recorded was about average, but with the exception of Tappan, I would say total number of water birds was small. The following species were recorded by DeGarmo and Conrad: great blue heron, Canada goose, mallard, black duck, baldpate, pintail, blue-winged teal, wood duck, redhead, ring-necked duck, scaup, golden-eye, ruddy duck, hooded merganser, American merganser, turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, marsh hawk, sparrow hawk, coot, killdeer, herring gull, ring-billed gull, belted kingfisher, flicker, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, phoebe, horned lark, crow, chickadee, tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, robin, bluebird, starling, English sparrow, meadowlark, red-wing, cowbird, cardinal, goldfinch, vesper sparrow, slate-colored junco, field sparrow and song sparrow.

Charles Conrad  
Wheeling, W. Va.

#### "Town" Birds

On April 20, 1947, as Louise and I were helping our neighbor, James McCarty, locate a pair of yellow warblers in his trees, the three of us were very much surprised to see a Wilson's snipe (Capella delicata) drop quickly into our garden. With the binoculars in our hands at the time and the snipe not more than 50 feet away, identification was a snap. As we approached, the bird moved from the garden and tried to hide behind some newspapers but this "cover" proved unsatisfactory and it did not hesitate in taking to the air. From the speed of flight I would say the bird was uninjured. Just why such a thickly populated spot was chosen for a landing is hard to imagine.

A similar experience for me was seeing a Pine siskin (Spinus pinus) on a McClung Street sidewalk February 7, 1947 as I came home from work. It was with some English sparrows and feeding (?) on the fruit "balls" under a sweet gum tree.

These unexpected finds are always pleasant, if a little difficult to explain sometimes. Both spots are within sight of the State House.

Alston Shields  
511B Nancy Street  
Charleston, W. Va.

#### Redpolls in Jefferson County, Ohio

On Sunday, March 2, 1947, while returning from a trip to Beatty Park, I was surprised to find a flock of about twenty-five common redpolls (Acanthis flammea) near my home. They were feeding on some ragweed seed that had grown up among some corn stubble. I watched them for about ten minutes, then walked the short distance to my home. Lois Lee, my daughter, returned with me to the spot for another look at the birds.

After satisfying ourselves, we returned home and called Clinton Banks. In a few minutes he arrived and we once again were fortunate in locating a part of the flock. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first record for the redpoll in Jefferson County.

Albert R. Tenney  
Steubenville, Ohio

#### Double-crested Cormorant at Cheat Lake

On April 12, 1947, the observer was fortunate in seeing a lone double-crested cormorant (Phalacrocorax auritus auritus) on Cheat Lake about a mile below the bridge at the entrance to Sunset Beach. The bird is a rare spring visitor here in Monongalia county.

William Wylie  
Morgantown, W. Va.