



# *The Redstart*

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## THE ORNITHOLOGICAL YEAR IN WEST VIRGINIA: 1947

By Maurice Brooks

For several years past, I have been attempting an annual review of ornithological happenings of interest in West Virginia. This is another paper in the series.

Of primary importance to ornithology in the state is the gratifying increase in the number of active bird students within the area. The Charleston group, long active, has been increased notably through the addition of trained wildlife technicians within the Conservation Commission. Charles O. Handley, Sr., is now residing in Charleston, and his two sons, Charles, Jr., and John, bring to the region three active and experienced bird students. Swank, Johnson, Lindzey, Seaman, Bailey, and others working out of Charleston, tend to give a much more nearly complete coverage of the state.

The Huntington center, under the able direction of Bayard Green, and Virginia Cavendish, has a rapidly growing group of field students. The Huntington Bird Club publishes a second West Virginia ornithological journal, The Chat. The Club brings to Huntington outstanding bird lecturers, and conducts very active programs for its own members.

The Wheeling group, now reinforced by the return of many men from the armed services, continues active in the northwestern portion of the state. The parent chapter of the Brooks Bird Club is sponsoring the Audubon Screen Tours. Regular field trips to points within the tri-state area are features of the program.

At Morgantown, there is a growing group of field students, and to meet the needs of these, new courses in ornithology, wildlife management, and conservation have been added.

The outstanding piece of field work done during the year by West Virginia observers is the continuing study of Swainson's warbler, Limnolthlypis swainsonii, in the Charleston area by Eleanor Sims, W. R. DeGarmo, and others. This year no less than eleven nests were under observation, probably more than have ever been studied by any other field group during a single season. Some of the results of this study were presented by Miss Sims and DeGarmo at the 1947 meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Club. W. C. Legg also continued his work on this species in Nicholas County.

The first West Virginia nest of the prothonotary warbler, Protonotaria citrea, was found in Wood County by Alston and Louise Shields. Long suspected of breeding in the state, this species has been singularly elusive, and the find fills an important gap in our ornithological knowledge.

A detailed study of the wild turkey, Meleagris gallopavo, in West Virginia was completed by Fred Glover, assisted by other technicians of the Conservation Commission. This is the most elaborate account of a game bird which has yet been made in the state. As a result of it, we are now on much firmer ground in estimating our turkey population, and in making plans for the management and further encouragement of this fine game species.

Dr. John W. Aldrich and Robert Stewart, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, spent several weeks in the high spruce country of Randolph and Pocahontas Counties. They were engaged primarily in making population studies, and as a result of their work a record population was found in a virgin spruce area. Just north of Gaudineer Knob, they recorded a population of 322 breeding pairs per hundred acres (in paper given at the 1947 A.O.U. meeting at Toronto).

The previous high population for a virgin spruce area was one found by Kendeigh in the Nipigon River region north of Lake Superior, in western Ontario. Kendeigh counted 319 breeding pairs per hundred acres, but believed that this population was at an abnormal high, due to a severe outbreak of the spruce bud worm. In the West Virginia area, however, there were no indications of an abnormal population. Incidentally, there was a remarkably close correlation in the species found in the two regions.

Sutton's warbler, Dendroica patomac, continues to be a fascinating puzzle. Miss Serena K. Dandridge, of Shepherdstown, reports (in correspondence) two birds which she identified as of this species on her own farm in May, 1947. Other searchers in the region were not fortunate enough to find any birds this year, but careful work in the region will certainly continue.

In the spruce belt there was a heavy, and generally distributed, crop of cones, but despite this there was only a single record of red crossbills, Loxia curvirostra, during the year, an individual noted by the writer in April. No reports of siskins, Spinus pinus pinus, came to my attention. After a fairly general invasion of evening grosbeaks, Hesperiphona vespertina vespertina, in 1945-46, there was only one 1947 record of this species. None returned to the Shepherdstown region where they had been abundant the previous winter.

A number of species which have, seemingly, been extending their ranges in West Virginia turned up at new points. Henslow's sparrows, Passerherbulus henslowii, were common in fields around Morgantown where they had not previously been noted. I found them also just outside Cacapon State Park, in

Morgan County. Prairie warblers, Dendroica discolor, continued their spread, both northward and to higher altitudes. I found them on the high ridge just west of Kingwood, Preston County, and noted them at a number of points in northern Monongalia County, and across the state line in Fayette County, Pennsylvania.

It should be emphasized once more that alder flycatchers, Empidonax trailii trailii, are not restricted to mountain swamps, as we once supposed. They have turned up at low elevations, wherever suitable alder swamps are to be found. A pair spent the summer in a small alder thicket within a quarter of a mile of my home in Morgantown.

Beaver ponds, so abundant on some of the mountain streams, are becoming increasingly interesting from an ornithological standpoint. Swank and DeGarmo have found breeding wood ducks, Aix sponsa, and black ducks, Anas rubripes, about some of these ponds. The Huntington group also found wood ducks at McCullough's pond, in Cabell County.

It might be well to emphasize here the possibilities of the many new water habitats which beavers, and the ponds constructed by the Soil Conservation Service, have created. These now number in the thousands, and they are having, and will have, a profound influence on breeding and migrating waterfowl populations. In a state without natural lakes, these ponds are likely to attract surprising numbers of birds.

Along similar lines, the state may soon be crossed from north to south by a chain of artificial lakes. Lake Lynn and the Grafton Reservoir are completed, Bluestone Dam is well underway, and the proposed Sutton Reservoir will provide another link in the lake system which will extend from the Pennsylvania border almost to Virginia. These lakes are likely to see at times the extensive waterfowl concentrations which sometimes occur during migration in this mountainous country.

As West Virginia becomes better known faunistically, our observers are turning more and more to life history studies. The Swainson's warbler investigation has been mentioned, and the Huntington group is engaged in a long-time study of the cardinal, Richmondia cardinalis. Professor P. C. Bibbee is completing his study of Bewick's wren, Thryomanes bewickii. There are splendid opportunities open to the Wheeling group, perhaps in an investigation of the inter-relations between blue-winged, Vermivora pinus, and golden-winged, Vermivora chrysoptera, warblers.

State workers have continued active in investigations of areas outside West Virginia. In this category, Green's specimen of Swainson's warbler from southeastern Ohio is notable. The Morgantown group has continued some work in Garrett County, Maryland.

There are two major regions in the state from which we have very inadequate bird notes. These are the southwestern area, including Wayne, Lincoln, Boone, Logan, Mingo, and McDowell Counties; and the eastern panhandle region, particularly in Morgan, Hardy, Grant, and Pendleton Counties. There are few, if any, resident observers in these regions, and both are potentially extremely interesting from an ornithological standpoint.

During the past year West Virginia bird students have played an increasingly important role in the work of the national ornithological societies. Affiliation between the Wilson Ornithological Club and the Brooks Bird Club was effectuated. At the 1947 Wilson Club meeting, members of the B.B.C. presented papers and took an active part in discussions. The Club was also represented on the program of the American Ornithologists' Union. There is every reason to hope that further recognition may come to the state in its ornithological workers.

Division of Forestry  
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Morgantown, West Virginia

### Century Day 1947

Each year in the month of May members of the Brooks Bird Club participate in what they call "Century Day." This means that on this particular day our aim is to record 100 species of birds, or more. Although the date selected is chosen for the height of migration, the feat of recording the 100 species requires considerable effort on the part of the participants. This year, 1947, May 11 was selected, and not only did the Wheeling group conduct a "Century Day," but also members in the Morgantown and Charleston, West Virginia areas.

The Wheeling group, which numbered 12, was in the field from 6:30 A.M. until 6:15 P.M., and covered Oglebay Park, Big Wheeling Creek, Miller's Hollow, Short Creek, Beech Bottom Swamp, and the Ohio River from Wellsburg to Wheeling. At the end of the day when all reports were received we found we had reached and passed our aim of 100 species with a grand total of 105. This marked the highest total club members have ever recorded on "Century Day."

At Morgantown, West Virginia, which is some 60 miles (as the crow flies) south-east of Wheeling, the group recorded 103 species. They worked the Morgantown area in the forenoon, then drove to Terra Alta via Bruceton Mills in the afternoon.

The Charleston Chapter of the Brooks Bird Club made its fourth annual effort at a "Century Day," and for the first time met with success. Through including such territory as the wooded swamps north of Winfield and Lake Washington near Hurricane, the group during the day reported a total of 105 species.

In all three sections the goal of 100 species was not only reached, but surpassed; which is an honor for all who took part.

In listing the species recorded by each of the groups, we have combined them in report form so that a comparison can easily be made of the different and like species in each section.

All three groups listed a total of 136 species, which included 30 different warblers.

Species	Wheeling W. Va.	Morgantown W. Va.	Charleston W. Va.
Green Heron	x	x	x
American Bittern	x	x	
Mallard		x	
Black Duck		x	
Blue-winged Teal		x	
Turkey Vulture	x	x	
Sharp-shinned Hawk		x	
Cooper's Hawk			x
Red-tailed Hawk	x		
Broad-winged Hawk	x		x
Sparrow Hawk	x	x	x
Ruffed Grouse	x		
Bob-white	x	x	x
Ring-necked Pheasant	x	x	
Sora	x	x	
Killdeer	x	x	x
Wilson's Snipe		x	
Spotted Sandpiper	x	x	x
Solitary Sandpiper	x	x	x
Greater Yellow-legs			x
Lesser Yellow-legs			x
Least Sandpiper	x		x
Rock Dove	x		
Mourning Dove	x	x	x
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	x	x	x
Black-billed Cuckoo	x	x	x
Whip-poor-will			x
Chimney Swift	x	x	x
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	x	x	x
Belted Kingfisher			x
Flicker	x	x	x
Pileated Woodpecker	x		
Red-bellied Woodpecker	x		
Red-headed Woodpecker	x		x
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		x	
Hairy Woodpecker	x	x	
Downy Woodpecker	x	x	x
Eastern Kingbird	x	x	x
Crested Flycatcher	x	x	x
Phoebe	x	x	x
Acadian Flycatcher	x	x	x
Least Flycatcher	x		
Wood Pewee	x		x
Horned Lark	x	x	x
Tree Swallow			x
Bank Swallow	x		
Rough-winged Swallow	x	x	x
Barn Swallow	x	x	x
Cliff Swallow		x	
Purple Martin	x	x	x
Blue Jay	x	x	x
Crow	x	x	x
Black-capped Chickadee		x	
Carolina Chickadee	x	x	x

Species	Wheeling	Morgantown	Charleston
	W. Va.	W. Va.	W. Va.
Tufted Titmouse	x	x	x
White-breasted Nuthatch	x	x	x
House Wren	x	x	x
Winter Wren		x	
Bewick's Wren	x	x	x
Carolina Wren	x	x	x
Catbird	x	x	x
Brown Thrasher	x	x	x
Robin	x	x	x
Wood Thrush	x	x	x
Hermit Thrush			x
Olive-backed Thrush	x	x	x
Veery		x	x
Bluebird	x	x	x
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	x	x	x
Golden-crowned Kinglet		x	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	x	x	x
Cedar Waxwing			x
Starling	x	x	x
White-eyed Vireo	x	x	x
Yellow-throated Vireo	x	x	x
Blue-headed Vireo	x	x	
Red-eyed Vireo	x	x	x
Warbling Vireo	x		x
Black and White Warbler	x	x	x
Swainson's Warbler			x
Worm-eating Warbler	x		x
Golden-winged Warbler		x	x
Blue-winged Warbler	x	x	x
Tennessee Warbler	x	x	x
Nashville Warbler	x	x	x
Parula Warbler		x	x
Yellow Warbler	x	x	x
Magnolia Warbler	x	x	
Black-throated Blue Warbler	x	x	x
Myrtle Warbler	x	x	x
Black-throated Green Warbler	x	x	x
Cerulean Warbler	x	x	x
Blackburnian Warbler	x	x	x
Chestnut-sided Warbler		x	x
Bay-breasted Warbler			x
Pine Warbler			x
Prairie Warbler		x	x
Western Palm Warbler			x
Oven-bird	x	x	x
Northern Water-Thrush			x
Louisiana Water-Thrush	x	x	x
Kentucky Warbler	x	x	x
Yellow-throat	x	x	x
Yellow-breasted Chat	x	x	x
Hooded Warbler	x	x	x
Wilson's Warbler	x		
Canada Warbler	x		
Redstart	x	x	x

Species	Wheeling	Morgantown	Charleston
	W. Va.	W. Va.	W. Va.
English Sparrow	x	x	x
Bobolink		x	x
Meadowlark	x	x	x
Red-wing	x	x	x
Orchard Oriole	x	x	x
Baltimore Oriole	x	x	x
Rusty Blackbird		x	
Purple Grackle	x	x	x
Cowbird	x	x	x
Scarlet Tanager	x	x	x
Summer Tanager			x
Cardinal	x	x	x
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	x	x	x
Indigo Bunting	x	x	x
Purple Finch	x	x	
Goldfinch	x	x	x
Towhee	x	x	x
Savannah Sparrow	x		x
Grasshopper Sparrow	x	x	x
Vesper Sparrow	x	x	x
Slate-colored Junco	x		
Tree Sparrow	x		
Chipping Sparrow	x	x	x
Field Sparrow	x	x	x
White-crowned Sparrow	x		x
White-throated Sparrow	x	x	x
Swamp Sparrow		x	
Song Sparrow	x	x	x

It is the hope of the Brooks Bird Club that other sections in the tri-state area will participate in the 1948 "Century Day" on May 16.

Charleston Report Russell DeGarmo  
 Morgantown Report Tubby Boggs  
 Wheeling Report Charles Conrad

#### A TRIP TO BEECH KNOB

On July 10 and 11, 1947, I visited the Beech Knob area on Big Clear Creek Mountain in Greenbrier County. About six hours were spent in this country of a beech-birch-maple forest association. The altitude of Beech Knob is around 4100 feet, nearby Little Beech is a hundred feet less and the forested flat ridges surrounding these knobs range around 3800' and 3900'. The flat top of Beech has been cleared, as has Little Beech and a long, wide ridge at the base of the latter. At first when I saw these bald knobs I thought of the rather mysterious balds of the southern mountains, but upon investigating it seems that a Mr. Williams had cleared them (a total of between 100 and 200 acres) many years ago as a range for cattle. He became in his day one of the richest, if not the richest, man in Greenbrier County from the cattle that he grazed on this mountain top, so I learned. A coal company at Clearco grazes horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs there at the present time, but in spite of the teeth and hooves, clumps of a thorny crataegus, other shrubs and vegetation have appeared and are attempting to reclaim their own, to pave the way for the ever-waiting surrounding forest.

On Beech there is an old wooden tower from which one can see a confusion - a glorious panorama - of valleys, ridges, flats, and other knobs, some of them higher than Beech. It is a very enticing scene and one wonders about the many secrets which that dissected country holds. One side of Beech is strewn with tremendous boulders, remnants of a great cliff that had been split asunder apparently after the teeth of erosion had carved out the deep valleys and the high knobs.

I feel that the following list does not give a hint of the possibilities of the area. There was very little bird song and it rained shortly after noon on both days. Some species are not included due to doubt as to their identities.

Ruffed Grouse, Bonasa umbellus, one bird flushed.

Wild Turkey, Meleagris gallopavo, a feather of this species was picked up on Beech Ridge, toward Job's Knob.

Chimney Swift, Chaetura pelagica, a few birds seen flying over Beech Knob.

Flicker, Colaptes auratus.

Wood Pewee, Contopus virens.

Raven, Corvus corax, heard twice on the 11th.

Crow, Corvus brachyrhynchos, a flock was apparently tormenting the raven.

Black-capped Chickadee, Parus atricapillus praticus.

White-breasted Nuthatch, Sitta c. carolinensis.

Bewick's Wren, Thyromanes b. bewickii, recorded at most farmhouses near Beech Knob on the 10th when I hiked from White Buck School.

Catbird, Dumetella carolinensis.

Robin, Turdus migratorius.

Veery, Hylocichla f. fuscescens, several singing on the 11th. None heard on the 10th but one was seen.

Bluebird, Sialia sialis sialis, recorded in the field near Little Beech.

Cedar Waxwing, Bombycilla cedrorum.

Mountain Vireo, Vireo solitarius alticola, a few heard singing and seen on the 11th.

Red-eyed Vireo, Vireo olivaceus.

Cairns's Black-throated Blue Warbler, Dendroica caerulescens cairnsi, on the 10th I recorded this warbler near White Buck School, in Nicholas County. This is the first summer county record for me (others have recorded it, of course). Also recorded in the Beech Knob area.



Black-throated Green Warbler, Dendroica v. virens, recorded all along the six miles that I hiked on the 10th.

Ovenbird, Seiurus aurocapillus, an adult with young recorded on Beech Flat.

Mourning Warbler, Oporornis philadelphia, several adults with young noted in the Beech Knob area. (A mysterious bird was responsible for the second trip. I was observing grosbeaks when a small warbler lit in a bush near me. It was strange to me, but I thought I'd find it in Peterson's Guide in a moment, but I couldn't find any such bird as I had seen. It had a yellow throat and a black patch on the breast - an immature mourning warbler, I decided later. The little rascal was responsible for my borrowing a jeep and being up there at Beech by 7:00 A.M. on the 11th.)

Hooded Warbler, Wilsonia citrina.

Scarlet Tanager, Piranga olivacea.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Pheucticus ludovicianus, one pair noted on the 10th. The male's song attracted my attention and I went over and observed them for some minutes. I took a young lad with me on the 11th mainly to show him a rose-breast. Nary a one did we find on that date!

Goldfinch, Spinus tristis tristis.

Vesper Sparrow, Poocetes gramineus gramineus.

Junco, Junco hyemalis carolinensis, several adults with young. First recorded at about 3450' altitude, according to my altimeter. Mr. Beaver, who lives near a Bench Mark where the altitude is 3123', said that he never saw snowbirds around his place during summer.

Field Sparrow, Spizella p. pusilla.

W. C. Legg  
Mt. Lookout, W. Va.

#### FIELD NOTES

On Sunday, November 9, the hikers on the regular afternoon nature walk at Oglebay Park surrounded and captured a bird that was fluttering in a clump of barberry. After the bird was carefully examined it turned out to be an olive-backed thrush, Hylocichla ustulata. The bird appeared to be tired and chilled, and after some kind treatment on the part of the hikers the thrush was released to go its way.

Bob McCausland  
Wheeling, West Virginia

#### Durbin Area Notes

In 1947 Mrs. Skaggs and I spent 8 days in the Durbin area. By comparing our notes with those of the June 7 - 15, 1947 Foray, it was very evident that the month of July was not nearly so good a time to study birds. However, one afternoon we set our banding trap in the parking area at Gaudineer Knob and caught two juncos, Junco hyemalis carolinensis, and a baby snowshoe rabbit! Of course we did not band the rabbit. The thrush chorus was still in evidence, although we did not hear all five singing at one time. The

winter wrens, Troglodytes t. pullus, sang every time we were up on Gaudineer Knob. The date of our visit was July 17 - 24. We were especially pleased to add two new birds to our life list. They were the raven, Corvus corax, and the wild turkey, Meleagris gallopavo. We saw the turkeys on Burner Mountain road which is at the south end of the Middle Mountain road. There were three old birds (evidently hens) with 11 little ones. It seemed to be sort of a communistic affair with all the old birds keeping a constant lookout for danger. We saw the group from our car as they fed in a sod field; as we drove close, the young dashed away from the road with a "pip - pip" call not unlike the call of our domestic fowl.

#### Mt. Lookout Notes

On May 30, 1947, we took advantage of an invitation from Bill Legg to come down and see the Swainson's warblers, Limothlypis swainsonii, taking with us Margarette Morse. Bill took us over the hills to the rhododendron tangle where he had noted the warblers previously, and in the course of a couple of hours we heard the songs of four Swainson warbler males as they defended their territories. The birds were very hard to see in the undergrowth and only once did I get a good look at one. We could easily understand why the nest of this bird is so hard to find - it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. The territory was full of Bewick wrens, Thryomanes bewickii, and we were pleased to hear their pleasant song again. The white-eyed vireo, Vireo griseus, was a new bird for Miss Morse's list. One little valley was a singing territory for several warblers that we do not have in the Cleveland area - prairie, Dendroica discolor; golden-winged, Vermivora chrysoptera; worm-eating, Helminthos vermivorus; and parula, Parula americana. Bill was a perfect host and we thoroughly enjoyed our visit. On the way home we saw a broad-winged hawk, Buteo platypterus platypterus, which is seldom seen in our territory.

Marian and Merrit Skaggs  
Cleveland, Ohio

#### Fox Sparrow

Always of interest to the bird students in the Wheeling section is a note on the fox sparrow, Passerella iliaca iliaca. This sparrow is very uncommon and always gives one a thrill when recorded. The writer has had that pleasure several times; the last being right in his own back yard, when on October 13, 1946, a single male was observed feeding on weed seed for approximately an hour. None has been recorded since.

Charles Conrad  
Wheeling, West Virginia

#### Vesper Sparrow

On January 4 and 8 Alton McClung recorded three vesper sparrows, Pooecetes g. gramineus, at Mt. Lookout. I have records for it in November and March, but this is our first record for winter.

W. C. Legg  
Mt. Lookout, W. Va.