William L. Hyslie

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William L. Hyslie

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The West Virginia Oological Collection of Charles Van Alstine

Lloyd F. Kiff

The collecting of wild bird eggs enjoyed great popularity in this country at the end of the 1800's and during the early part of this century. Most persons interested in birds during that period collected eggs at some point in their ornithological development, and the earlier volumes of Bent's "Life Histories" were compiled almost entirely from the contributions of "oologists", or egg collectors. Some private individuals amassed huge collections of eggs through exchanges or by purchases from natural history dealers, in addition to their personal collection activities.

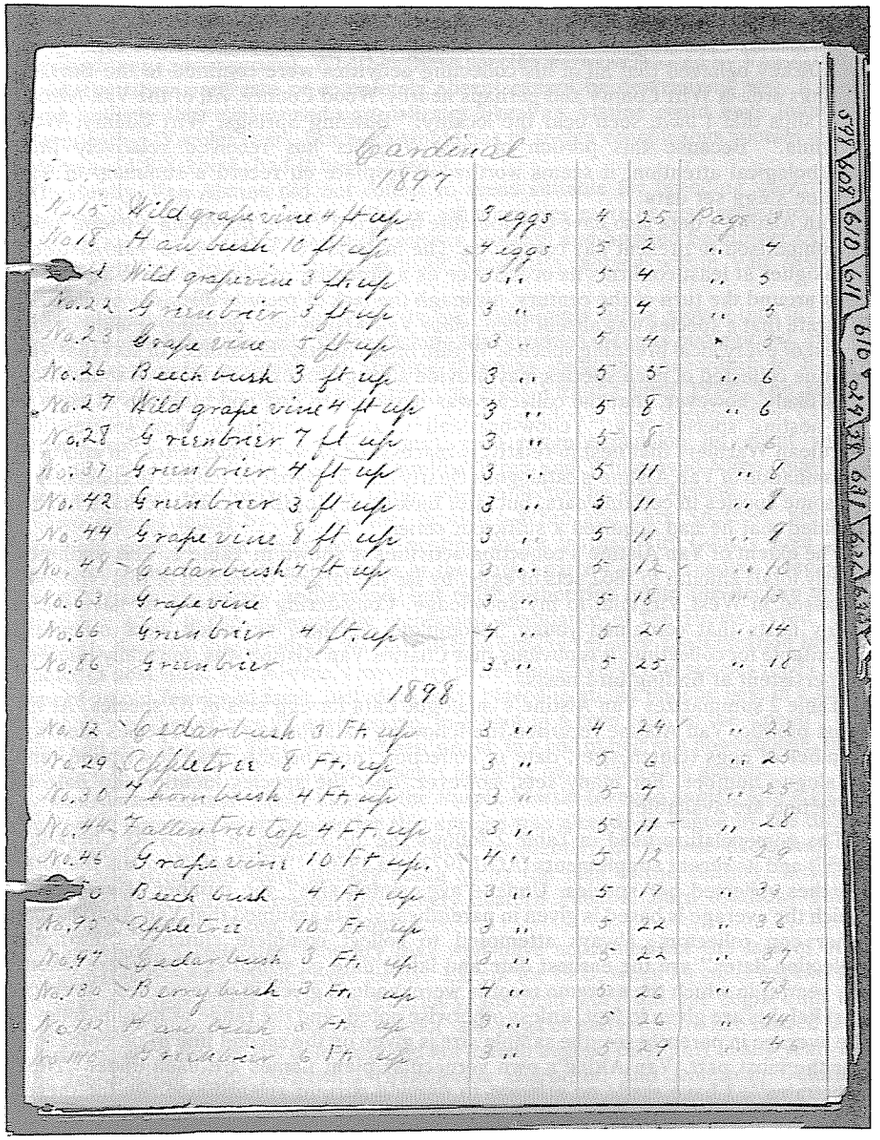
As this century progressed, changing attitudes towards nature enjoyment resulted in regulations that restricted indiscriminate collecting, and there was a gradual discontinuance of egg collecting as a hobby. Fortunately, because most oologists recorded accurate data (including species identity, date and place of collection, and details about the nest) on slips that accompanied each "set", or clutch of eggs, their specimens are still useful for scientific study, despite the fact that most were collected merely for sport. Most persons knowledgeable about birds today are aware of the essential contribution that old egg collections have made in documenting the disastrous impact of DDT upon eggshell thinning in many of the world's predatory bird species.

Since its formation in 1956, the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, a research organization in Los Angeles, has sought to acquire the neglected egg collections of past eras and to centralize them in order to facilitate their research use. We have now obtained about 100 such collections, and their combined specimens represent a unique research resource for biologists.

Thanks in large part to BBC member, Ralph Bell, the Western Foundation recently acquired the bird egg, nest and study skin collection of Samuel S. Dickey, of Waynesburg, Pennsylvania. Among Dr. Dickey's copious notes, I discovered three notebooks that apparently comprise the bulk of the serial catalogue of the Charles Van Alstine egg collection. Van Alstine had long been known to me as one of the few egg collectors to have been active in West Virginia. However, aside from a few sets of his eggs that the Western Foundation had received from diverse sources, I had been able to learn virtually nothing of the scope of his collecting activities.

According to all available information, Van Alstine lived in the now extinct town of Burning Springs, Wirt County, West Virginia during the early part of this century. In a letter written several years ago, Dr. Dickey stated that Van Alstine had been employed as the "chain man" on oil survey gangs, and his egg catalogues contain frequent references to nests found on drilling rigs and other structures associated with the oil fields. A note by Dickey on the inside cover of one of the catalogues indicates that he received the notes from Van Alstine prior to the latter's death in the Masonic Home in Parkersburg, West Virginia sometime in the early 1940's.

Van Alstine evidently did not write about his collecting activities since there is no mention of him in Brooks' (1938) thorough bibliography of West Virginia ornithology. I did locate the following advertisement placed by him in The Oologist for February, 1912: "4000 A. number one eggs in sets for same. Many common ones wanted, some in large series. All letters answered. C. E. VAN ALSTINE, Burning Springs, West Va.," The present whereabouts of the bulk of Van Alstine's collection is unknown, and the few sets housed at the Western Foundation were probably exchanged to collectors who responded to his 1912 advertisement.



Cardinal
1897
No.15 Wild grapevine 4 ft up 3 eggs 4 25 Aug 3
No.18 Hawbush 10 ft up 4 eggs 5 2 " 4
No.21 Wild grapevine 3 ft up 3 " 5 4 " 5
No.22 Greenbrier 3 ft up 3 " 5 4 " 5
No.23 Grape vine 5 ft up 3 " 5 4 " 5
No.26 Beech bush 3 ft up 3 " 5 5 " 6
No.27 Wild grape vine 4 ft up 3 " 5 8 " 6
No.28 Greenbrier 7 ft up 3 " 5 8 " 6
No.37 Greenbrier 4 ft up 3 " 5 11 " 8
No.42 Greenbrier 3 ft up 3 " 5 11 " 8
No.44 Grape vine 8 ft up 3 " 5 11 " 8
No.48 Cedarbush 7 ft up 3 " 5 12 " 10
No.63 Grapevine 3 " 5 18 " 13
No.66 Greenbrier 4 ft up 4 " 5 21 " 14
No.86 Greenbrier 3 " 5 25 " 16
1898
No.12 Cedarbush 3 ft up 3 " 4 24 " 22
No.29 Appletree 8 ft up 3 " 5 6 " 25
No.30 Hawbush 4 ft up 3 " 5 7 " 25
No.44 Fallen tree top 4 ft up 3 " 5 11 " 26
No.45 Grapevine 10 ft up 4 " 5 12 " 26
No.70 Beech bush 4 ft up 3 " 5 17 " 33
No.75 Appletree 10 ft up 3 " 5 22 " 36
No.97 Cedarbush 3 ft up 3 " 5 22 " 37
No.124 Berrybush 3 ft up 4 " 5 26 " 43
No.132 Hawbush 3 ft up 3 " 5 26 " 44
No.140 Greenbrier 6 ft up 3 " 5 27 " 46

A page from the notebooks of Charles Van Alstine.

The notes that we obtained with the Dickey collection cover Van Alstine's activities in the years 1897-1899, 1901, 1902, 1904-1906, and 1908-1915. There is no indication as to whether he collected during other years; however, certain references in the existing catalogues suggest that there were originally additional notebooks.

No locality data are given for any of the egg sets listed in Van Alstine's catalogues, but Dickey believed that all of his collecting activities were confined to the Burning Springs area in Wirt County and perhaps nearby Wood County. All of the Van Alstine data slips that I have seen bear the locality, "Burning Springs, Wirt County, West Virginia." Because this portion of west Virginia has received relatively little ornithological attention, it seems worthwhile to place on record a summary of Van Alstine's egg set data.

Van Alstine's data also have considerable historical value, providing a useful basis of comparison to present day conditions. The inclusion of a species in Van Alstine's catalogues at least confirms its occurrence as a breeding resident in the Wirt County area around the turn of the century, although the lack of records does not necessarily indicate that a species was absent then, since Van Alstine was probably unable to find a nest of every local breeding species. Within broad limits, the number of sets that Van Alstine collected of each species may provide a rough index to its relative abundance. It is likely, however, that the collector was more apt to find and take sets of eggs of low-nesting species, e.g., Yellow-breasted Chats or Cardinals, than species like Cerulean Warblers that nest in relatively inacessible or well hidden sites. In addition, examination of Van Alstine's catalogues clearly indicates that he tended to concentrate on some species in certain years, but later took no sets of them at all, perhaps having decided that he had acquired a sufficient series.

The extent of Van Alstine's collecting activities is shown in Table 1. The combined yearly totals amount to 1862 sets of eggs, by far the largest collection of this type ever amassed in West Virginia, to my knowledge. Considering that he must have found many nests that contained young, incomplete clutches, or which were otherwise unsuitable for collecting, it is obvious that Charles Van Alstine was unusually talented or persistent at finding bird nests!

Table 2 summarizes Van Alstine's catalogue data for egg sets of 67 species. At his most prolific, Van Alstine recorded the following data for egg sets: Species identity, number of eggs (clutch size), date of collection, nest height, nest description, and catalogue number. For many sets, however, only the species identity and date of collection are available.

The nomenclature used in Table 2 follows the 5th edition of the AOU Check-list (1957) and its recent supplements (AOU 1973 and 1976). "Total sets" equals the total clutches collected per species. Under "avg. clutch size" the number of sets upon which the average is based is given in parentheses. It is assumed that Van Alstine, like other egg collectors, always attempted to collect complete clutches. "Extreme collection dates" are the earliest date and latest date on which egg sets were taken; the year(s) in which the extreme records were made is given in parentheses. Average nest heights are given in feet, unless otherwise noted, and the range of heights follows the average in parentheses; the sample size is given on the second line in parentheses. For the most part, Van Altine's own vernacular plant names are used under "Nest substrates". I have made no attempt to provide current scientific names for these, since this would be presumptive in many instances.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Van Alstine's species list is the absence of certain birds that are now presumably common breeding residents in the Wirt County area. These include American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), Rough-winged Swallow

(*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*), Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*), White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*), Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*), Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*), Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*), Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*), Kentucky Warbler (*Oporornis formosus*), Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*), Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), and Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*). Whether these species were overlooked by Van Alstine, or whether they were rare or completely absent cannot be determined now. It does seem unlikely that a seasoned egg collector like Van Alstine could have found 20 Worm-eating Warbler nests, but not a single one of such a conspicuous species as the Red-winged Blackbird, had it been present.

Evidently, Van Alstine did not collect in areas suitable for breeding waterbirds, since his list contains no ducks, rails, or other species more or less associated with watered areas, e.g., Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*) and Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*). Such habitats may have been completely lacking within Van Alstine's usual collecting area.

Some species that are lacking from the list have almost surely moved into the Wirt County region more recently. These include Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*), and Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). According to Brooks (1944), the latter species did not arrive in West Virginia until 1914. The steady northward movement of Mockingbirds in recent decades is well documented. Certain other species involved in a similar northward range expansion in recent years, including Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Wren and White-eyed Vireo, may well have been near the limits of their range when collected by Van Alstine.

Two species found by Van Alstine, Bewick's Wren and Lark Sparrow, are now probably gone or near extinction as nesting forms in the Wirt County area. The reasons for the virtual disappearance of the Lark Sparrow as a breeding species in West Virginia are poorly understood, but most authorities relate the decline of the Bewick's Wren to the dramatically increasing abundance of the House Wren. It is certainly doubtful that Bewick's Wrens suffered because of over-specialization in their choice of nest sites. Van Alstine's inventory of nest locations of this species reads like a tour of an old-fashioned farm, including nests placed in an old phoebe nest in a sheep shed, in a basket of corn in a wellhouse, in a boot in a corn crib, in the "point" of a pipe and also in a pipe joint, in an old hen's nest, in a coil of belt in a powerhouse, in an old sack in a closet, and in a quart bucket hanging on a stake in a garden.

Van Alstine did not collect eggs of the Purple Martin (*Progne subis*), although the custom of erecting lavish houses for this species was already in vogue by the turn of the century. Other species that now nest frequently, or almost exclusively on man-made structures were already doing so by the turn of the century, including Chimney Swift, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Barn Swallow, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, and Robin.

Van Alstine's collecting itinerary may well have accounted for the lack of other presumably common species from his list. Except for 1905, when he collected two sets of eggs of Great Horned Owls in February, his field work did not begin until late March, and this is probably why he did not take eggs of early nesters like Barred Owls (*Strix varia*). Similarly, his field work did not extend beyond early July in any year, and the late-nesting Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) and American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) may not have initiated egg-laying that early.

The relative abundance of the two cuckoo species, as indicated by Van Alstine's collecting totals, is striking: Black-bills (20 sets) out-numbered yellow-bills (5 sets) by a ratio of 4:1. Most current observers would agree that Yellow-billed Cuckoos are presently far more abundant than Black-billed Cuckoos in the Wirt County region.

Since there is no reason to believe that Van Alstine had a particular bias towards collecting black-bill eggs (the two species nest in nearly identical situations), this may indicate a real shift in the relative abundance of the two species in the intervening years. A similar relationship may exist for the two tanager species. Van Alstine collected nearly three times as many sets of eggs of Summer Tanagers as of Scarlet Tanagers, but the two species are now probably about equally common in the Wirt-Wood County region.

Assuming that Van Alstine kept and recorded the Brown-headed Cowbird eggs that he found (some collectors did not), the relative scarcity of that species during his collecting tenure is striking, compared to its present-day abundance in most parts of West Virginia. Like many other species mentioned in the foregoing discussion, the cowbird's distribution has been profoundly affected by man's activities.

The original catalogues of Charles Van Alstine are deposited in the archives of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, and data from them will be provided upon request. I am grateful to Dr. George Hall for his helpful comments and to my wife, Julie, for her assistance in preparing this manuscript.

TABLE 2. Summary of Charles Van Alstine egg collection data.

SPECIES	TOTAL SETS	AVG. CLUTCH SIZE	EXTREME COLLECTION DATES	AVG. NEST HEIGHT	NEST SUBSTRATES
Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)	3	2.0 (1)	19 April (1912) to 26 April (1908)		Crevice in rock cliff
Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*)	2	3.5 (2)	12 May (1914) to 13 May (1898)	50.0 (40-60) (2)	Pine: 1; hickory: 1
Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)	19	3.9 (10)	15 April (1898) to 3 July (1909)	56.7 (40-60) (9)	Beech: 6; chestnut: 2; white oak: 1
Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)	20	2.1 (14)	20 March (1915) to 28 April (1915)	67.6 (42-90) (14)	Hickory: 5; white oak: 3; beech: 3; black oak: 2; maple: 1
Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)	2	3.5 (2)	7 April (1914) to 4 April (1915)	48.5 (35-62) (2)	Chestnut: 1; beech: 1
Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*)	6	3.0 (1)	5 May (1908) to 16 May (1908)	40 (1)	Hickory: 1
Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*)	4	11.3 (3)	29 April (1899) to 20 May (1904)		On ground: 3
Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*)	5	12.0 (1)	28 May (1910) to 2 July (1909)		On ground: 1
Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)	2	3.5 (2)	8 May (1898) to 21 May (1899)		On ground: 2
American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*)	3	3.0 (2)	24 March (1909) to 26 May (1898)		On ground: 3
Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)	2	2.0 (1)	18 April (1913) to 23 May (1899)	3 (1)	On stump: 1
Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)	5	2.75 (4)	17 May (1899) to 23 June (1908)	5.0 (4-6) (4)	Apple: 1; grapevine: 1; unidentified bush: 2
Black-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus erythropthalmus*)	20	2.4 (12)	12 May (1899) to 18 June (1908)	7.8 (4-10) (9)	Maple: 2; apple: 2; dogwood: 2; beech: 2; berry: 1; Unidentified bush: 2
Screech Owl (*Otus asio*)	1		8 April 1909		

SPECIES	TOTAL SETS	AVG. CLUTCH SIZE	EXTREME COLLECTION DATES	AVG. NEST HEIGHT	NEST SUBSTRATES
Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)	2	2.0 (2)	17 to 26 Feb. 1905	50.0 (40-60) (2)	Chestnut: 2
Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*)	80	2.0 (58)	6 May (1905) to 3 July (1906)		On ground
Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*)	1	4.0 (1)	14 June 1898		In boiler stack
Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*)	20	2.0 (10)	7 May (1910) to 2 July (1898)	17.0 (10-25) (10)	Beech: 7; buckeye: 2; Oak: 1
Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*)	2	7.0 (1)	10 May (1899) to 19 May (1908)		Burrow in riverbank
Common Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)	24	6.4 (12)	24 April (1913) to 2 June (1906)	12.6 (6-20) (10)	Beech: 4; maple: 1; apple: 1; unidentified stub: 3; fence-post: 2; building: 1
Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*)	2	6.0 (1)	21 April (1913) to 28 April (1914)	50 (1)	Locust: 1
Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*)	4	5.0 (1)	29 April (1909) to 1 June (1906)	45 (1)	Oak: 1
Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*)	19	4.8 (15)	13 April (1906) to 3 June (1898)	17.9 (8-60) (15)	Apple: 6; beech: 5; buckeye: 4; unidentified tree: 1
Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*)	4	3.0 (4)	15 May (1902) to 12 June (1898)	14.2 (10-20) (4)	Apple: 3; locust: 1
Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*)	2	5.0 (1)	28 May (1899) to 24 June (1908)		Oil well casing
Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*)	82	4.75 (49)	8 April (1906) to 21 June (1898)		Buildings: 24; bridges: 6; natural rock cliffs: 20
Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*)	56	3.0 (32)	18 May (1902) to 4 July (1909)	13.7 (6-20) (32)	Beech: 31; dogwood: 1
Eastern Wood Pewee (*Contopus virens*)	3	2.7 (3)	20 May (1902) to 18 June (1898)	26.7 (20-40) (3)	Walnut: 2; beech: 1

SPECIES	TOTAL SETS	AVG. CLUTCH SIZE	EXTREME COLLECTION DATES	AVG. NEST HEIGHT	NEST SUBSTRATES
Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*)	2	4.5 (2)	20 May (1904) to 31 May (1898)		Burrow in dirt bank
Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)	1	4.0 (1)	6 June 1904		On side of rafter in barn
Common Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)	49	4.6 (27)	3 April (1909) to 28 May (1910)	33.8 (15-60) (25)	Beech: 12; white oak: 5; locust: 3; black oak: 1; pine: 1; cedar: 1; chestnut: 1; maple: 1; hickory: 1
Tufted Titmouse (*Parus bicolor*)	17	6.0 (13)	12 April (1906) to 1 June (1906)	13.3 (1-35) (11)	Beech: 4; apple: 3; dogwood: 2; poplar: 1; locust: 1; oak: 1; pipe joint: 1; bird house: 1
Carolina Chickadee (*Parus carolinensis*)	51	6.1 (42)	22 April (1914) to 4 June (1904)	4.5 (1-15) (35)	Unidentified stump: 10; buck-eye: 6; apple: 2; gum: 1; beech: 1; hickory: 1; locust: 1; willow: 1; black oak: 1; rotten limb: 4; basswood: 1; pipe joint: 1; fencepost: 12
Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*)	37	6.4 (20)	11 April (1906) to 29 June (1898)		Man-made structures: 11; fencepost: 5; logs: 2; brush-pile: 1
Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)	42	4.9 (25)	6 April (1898) to 3 July (1906)		Man-made structures: 16; natural stumps or tree roots: 8
Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*)	50	4.0 (38)	9 May (1899) to 2 July (1906)	7.5 (2-15) (38)	Apple: 22; elm: 4; rose: 4; berry: 2; currant: 1; alder: 1; coral bush: 1; maple: 1; spice-bush: 1; unidentified bush: 1
Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*)	10	4.2 (9)	18 April (1914) to 11 May (1914 & 1915)	2.9 (2-4) (8)	Hawthorn: 8; brushpile: 1
Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)	37	3.7 (25)	5 April (1914) to 22 May (1904)	9.5 (5-15) (18)	Man-made structures: 7; apple: 7; elm: 4; beech: 2; buckeye: 2; locust: 1; service-berry: 1

SPECIES	TOTAL SETS	AVG. CLUTCH SIZE	EXTREME COLLECTION DATES	AVG. NEST HEIGHT	NEST SUBSTRATES
Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*)	87	4.0 (68)	25 April (1910) to 11 June (1905)	9.4 (3-20) (67)	Apple: 22; beech: 13; dogwood: 7; oak sp.: 4; elm: 2; grapevine: 2; white oak: 5; spicebush: 2; sugarberry: 1; cedar: 1; berry thicket: 1; maple: 2; unidentified tree: 3
Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*)	51	4.8 (44)	28 March (1897) to 29 May (1898)	6.8 (0-15) (36)	Apple: 17; poplar: 7; fencepost: 7; beech: 4; buckeye: 2; peach: 2; elm: 2; oak sp.: 1; white oak: 1; black walnut: 1; unidentified stump: 1
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*)	37	4.6 (17)	27 April (1914) to 12 June (1909)	19.3 (10-40) (17)	Apple: 6; white oak: 3; locust: 3; black walnut: 2; beech: 1; gum: 1; hickory: 1; oak sp.: 1
Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)	39	3.5 (23)	1 May (1911) to 27 June (1909)	8.5 (3-20) (21)	Apple: 8; maple: 4; hickory: 3; redbud: 2; oak: 2; beech: 1; dogwood: 1; unidentified tree: 1
White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*)	10	3.75 (4)	12 May (1899 & 1910) to 4 June (1913)	2.7 (2-3) (4)	Hawthorn: 3; unidentified bush: 1
Black and White Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*)	11	4.75 (8)	6 May (1905) to 25 June (1906)		On ground: 7
Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorus*)	20	5.4 (16)	12 May (1899) to 30 June (1909)		On ground: 16
Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*)	30	4.5 (26)	10 May (1914 & 1915) to 30 May (1898 & 1908)	13.1 (8-20) (24)	Apple: 22; elm: 3; sycamore: 1
Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*)	7	4.0 (5)	12 May (1899 & 1911) to 25 May (1908)	37.0 (20-55) (5)	White oak: 4; oak sp.: 1
Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*)	71	4.7 (39)	7 May (1913) to 4 July (1906)		On ground: 39

SPECIES	TOTAL SETS	AVG. CLUTCH SIZE	EXTREME COLLECTION DATES	AVG. NEST HEIGHT	NEST SUBSTRATES
Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*)	74	4.75 (44)	14 April (1914) to 3 June (1898)	3.5 (from water's edge) (2-5) (19)	On ground on river bank: 19
Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*)	10	4.7 (7)	13 May (1899) to 28 May (1899)	2.9 in. (0-6in.) (7)	"Bunch of weeds": 3; spicebush: 3; on ground: 19
Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*)	132	4.1 (95)	4 May (1911) to 21 June (1909)	3.6 (2-6) (90)	Berry: 55; greenbrier: 26; "brier tangle": 4; grapevine: 3; rose: 2; spicebush: 1; unidentified bush: 1
Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*)	15	3.8 (6)	13 May (1899) to 3 June (1906)	3.0 (1-4) (5)	Ash: 2; rattleweed: 2; maple: 1; unidentified bush: 1
American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)	10	3.9 (9)	5 May (1914) to 2 July (1906)	26.5 (14-60) (9)	Beech: 6; white oak: 1; oak sp.: 2
House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)	9	5.0 (7)	14 April (1914) to 23 May (1899)		Apple: 4 (one in hole); man-made structures: 3
Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*)	5	4.25 (4)	18 May (1902) to 7 June (1904)	18.7 (10-40) (4)	Apple: 2; locust: 1; sycamore: 1
Northern (Baltimore) Oriole (*Icterus galbula*)	2		15 May (1912) & 2 June (1911)		
Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*)	17	4.65 (17)	6 May (1909) to 2 June (1904)	18.6 (8-30) (17)	Elm: 11; maple: 3; locust: 2; apple: 1
Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*)	4		6 May (1904) to 12 May (1905)		One egg in nests of Eastern Phoebe, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Ovenbird, and Louisiana Waterthrush
Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)	25	3.7 (9)	12 May (1911) to 29 June (1908)	12.1 (8-15) (8)	White oak: 5; hickory: 3; oak sp.: 1
Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*)	9	3.4 (7)	13 May (1899) to 22 June (1898)	20.4 (8-50) (7)	Beech: 3; apple: 2; hickory: 1; maple: 1

SPECIES	TOTAL SETS	AVG. CLUTCH SIZE	EXTREME COLLECTION DATES	AVG. NEST HEIGHT	NEST SUBSTRATES
Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)	177	3.2 (142)	11 April (1906) to 7 July (1898)	4.5 (2-15) (139)	Cedar: 53; greenbrier: 25; wild grape: 20; beech bush: 15; berry bush: 11; hawthorn: 7; rose: 2; pawpaw: 2; apple: 2; brushpile: 1; fallen tree top: 1
Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)	41	4.0 (34)	12 May (1899) to 16 June (1909)	3.2 (2-6) (31)	Berry bush: 10; hickory: 6; spicebush: 5; maple: 2; ash: 1; unidentified bush: 9
Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythropthalmus*)	29	3.7 (12)	14 April (1909) to 7 July (1906)	5.3 in. (0-24 in.) (12)	On ground: 8; unidentified bush: 4
Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*)	2	3.5 (2)	25 May (1905) & 31 May (1904)		On ground: 2
Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)	1	4.0 (1)	2 July 1906		On ground
Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*)	33	3.9 (30)	16 April (1911) to 7 June (1906)	7.4 (2-15) (28)	Apple: 16; grapevine: 3; cedar: 3; hawthorn: 3; plum: 1; elm: 1; unidentified bush: 1
Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*)	76	4.0 (56)	17 April (1914) to 10 July (1898)	2.0 (0-4) (49)	Berry bush: 16; beech bush: 10; greenbrier: 5; cedar: 1; tuft of grass: 11; on ground 1; unidentified bush: 18
Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*)	11	4.1 (9)	11 May (1898) to 12 June (1906)	6.2 in. (0-24 in.) (8)	On ground: 5; beech bush: 2; unidentified bush: 2

Table 1. Summary of Charles Van Alstine's egg collecting activities.

Year	No. Sets Collected	Duration of Collecting Activity
1897	91	28 March to 29 May
1898	221	3 April to 10 July
1899	225	2 April to 3 June
1901	12	9 April to 26 May
1902	63	3 April to 30 May
1904	144	9 April to 15 June
1905	62	17 Feb. to 30 May
1906	220	8 April to 7 July
1908	236	5 April to 30 June
1909	221	23 March to 4 July
1910	50	10 April to 28 May
1911	26	2 April to 5 June
1912	58	25 March to 1 June
1913	56	15 April to 10 June
1914	61	29 March to 21 May
1915	58	20 March to 19 May
Unspecified	58	20 March to 19 May
TOTAL: 1862 sets		

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Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology
1100 Glendon Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90024

Northward Expansion of the Yellow-throated Warbler

J. Lawrence Smith

Nearly a half century ago the observation of a Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica albilora*) in central West Virginia was worthy of note in ornithological literature. Maurice Brooks observed the species on the Buckhannon River in Upshur County on May 8, 1931. The bird was studied carefully determining that it belonged to the *albilora* or sycamore race and notes on the observation were published in the "Auk."

On June 10, 1976 I found four Yellow-throated Warblers at the French Creek Game Farm where I had first found the bird in late July 1974. One was found in a spruce near the offices before flying high into a yellow poplar not far away while others were heard and seen across the highway in tall white pines near the workshops. Later one was heard in a row of tall pines near the French Creek Presbyterian Church.

The number of birds found at the game farm is further evidence of the northward movement and range expansion of the species in West Virginia. The appearance of the warbler at this location seems to have occurred in the very recent past. It was not found here during the Brooks Bird Club Foray held in Upshur County during June 1972.

The earliest record of the bird in the Kanawha Valley is two collected near Coalburg in mid-July 1872 by William Seymour Edwards who was collecting in company with W. E. D. Scott. Even though Scott gives no indication of the type of habitat in which the specimens were taken in his list, it has long been known to prefer the rather open pine woods on the bluffs along the high ridges back from the Kanawha River. It could easily be found at Hawk's Nest and near Kanawha City at Charleston and Shreve (1962) has noted the numbers of the bird found in pines at the Berry Hills Country Club near South Charleston.

In recent years it has become much more numerous and wide-spread in the Kanawha Valley. In early July 1972 I had opportunity to study it along a dry ridge near Tornado, Kanawha County. I found it rather numerous in the oak and pine woods along the crest of the ridge and even present on the lower slope where only a few pines were mixed with the predominately oak forest.

The appearance of the bird in some numbers in sycamore woods along streams near the Ohio River seems to be a rather recent occurrence since there are few past records. Hicks (1945) calls the bird "decidedly rare" and writes of finding a nest in sycamore woods in Mud River near Huntington on May 28, 1939. Edeburn (1960) notes observations of the species by only two observers. In 1961 during the Brooks Bird Club Foray held in Wetzel County, it was found in sycamore woods which would seem to be evidence of at least local occurrence along the Ohio River. On May 27, 1972 I found it in Cabell County singing in sycamore woods near Salt Rock and also in pines at Asbury Woods camp nearby.

I first found it at the McClintic Wildlife Station on September 7, 1963 where it was appearing in numbers in a few years in migration and remaining to breed in the woods of sycamore and oak along Old Town Creek. On April 14, 1977 I heard six singing along Old Town Creek on a walk from Bethel Church road to pond 17.

Mengel (1965) discusses habitat preference of the species in Kentucky and notes that birds in eastern counties of the state frequent pine woods. As the bird has moved north in West Virginia it has begun appearing in numbers in sycamore woods where it seems to have largely been absent in the past and has become more numerous in pine forests where it has bred for many years. The expectation of finding the bird in certain habitat now seems to have little validity and it even seems to be occupying ecological situations rather unlike its preferences in the past.

By 1970 the bird had reached the Northern Panhandle with Nevada Laitsch finding two in Marshall County on 3 May while the following summer Glen Phillips found it near Bethany. By this time it must have spilled over into Pennsylvania with Ralph Bell banding an immature bird at Clarksville on August 12, 1971. By the spring of 1976 it had nearly reached the top of the panhandle when E. R. Chandler found it at New Cumberland.

Elsewhere various observers have found it during the breeding season at North Bend State Park and other locations in Ritchie County, at Cedar Lakes near Ripley and near Sutton Lake. George Hall found it at three locations near Morgantown during the spring of 1975 and it was also reported from Elkins that season. I found one in song in sycamores along a small creek near Farmington on May 24, 1976.

One of the highlights of summer when I began studying birds was seeking the yellow-throated warbler far up the hollows near Kanawha City and it held a special fascination for me ever since. I have followed with keen interest its range expansion northward in West Virginia and population increase during the past decade. In recent years finding this attractive warbler with flaming throat and lilting, rambling song in areas where it was unknown in the past has added greatly to the reward of field work.

2012 South Kanawha Street
Beckley, West Virginia 25801

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American Avocet in West Virginia

Albert R. Buckelew, Jr.

An American Avocet (Recurvirostra americana) was found in Marshall County, West Virginia and brought to Penny Thomas, Animal Curator at the Oglebay Park Good Zoo on July 6, 1977. Terri Stahara of Cameron, West Virginia found the injured Avocet in a mud puddle in a corn field about five miles from Cameron. The bird, an adult of unknown sex, was blind in the right eye and had a damaged left eye. Ms. Thomas kept the bird alive several days, handfeeding it insects. The Avocet subsequently died. No specimen was kept.

This would appear to establish a new state record for the West Virginia bird list. The American Avocet breeds from eastern Washington, central Alberta, southern Saskatchewan and southern Manitoba south to southern California, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, western Texas and northern Oklahoma. There is an old record from Egg Harbor, New Jersey. The bird winters from central California and southern Texas to Guatemala. The species migrates on both coasts of North America. It could be surmised that the American Avocet given to Ms. Thomas was accidentally injured and wandered aimlessly until found, starving in a Marshall County corn field.

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FIELD NOTES

Glen Phillips, Editor
R.D. 2
Triadelphia, W. Va. 26059

THE FALL SEASON

September 1 through November 30, 1977

It was a good fall for birding. In contrast to last fall we had little cold weather until late in the period. There was some rain causing the absence of the warm sunny fall days so dear to our hearts, but that seemed to keep the migratory birds coming more evenly without noticeable "waves." Norris Gluck cited heavier concentrations of birds Sept. 8-9, 22, 29, Oct. 10, 18 and Nov. 1 but the operation at Allegheny Front Migration Observatory (A.F.M.O.), while banding a record 7544 birds, had few days of record catches. The "Hawkwatch" was unspectacular except at Peter's Mountain where 5484 birds were recorded. To quote George Koch there were "no outstanding days and no complete washouts, the season was early and spread out."

This seems to be the winter for northern finches in our area with most of the expected species having been seen. While most are in lower numbers, Evening Grosbeaks are plentiful. I wish I could have seen the White-winged Crossbills.

Loons, Grebes, Herons - Common Loons were noted throughout the region during migration, these are usually seen in small numbers but this year two flocks were observed, one of 23 at Washington, Pa. Nov. 12 (M&RH) and one of 30 on Cheat Lake, W. V. Nov. 12 (GH). An immature **Red-necked Grebe** was seen near Uniontown, Pa. Oct. 22 (VJ). The migration of **Horned Grebes** was noticeable Nov. 22-29 with an early date of Oct. 28 at Harrisonburg, Va. (KF). John Smith felt that **Pied-billed Grebes** were more frequent than in past years around Beckley, W.V. The bulk of migration was between Oct. 10 and Nov. 20. Jim Phillips noted a **Double-crested Cormorant** at Glenwood Park near Princton, W.V. Nov. 24. **Great blue Herons** appeared to be in normal numbers. A delayed report noted 2 young along the South Branch of the Potomac River near Petersburg in the spring (Alma Cowherd fide KF). Last report of a **Green Heron** was from Washington, Pa. Oct. 18 (SH). Another delayed report was of **Little Blue Herons** seen along the Potomac River in Berkeley Co. W.V. in the third week of August (CM) A mature little Blue Heron was seen within the report period at Bethany, W.V. by Janet Lanza (fide JB). Two heronries of **Black-crown Night Herons** were reported on North Fork of Shenandoah River near New Market, Va. by Mary and Dick Smith.

Waterfowl - Whistling Swans moved through the area in excellent numbers primarily in late November, but Clark Miller reported three in Jefferson Co., W.V. as early as Oct. 6. Most **Canada Geese** migrated through during late October and early November but one was seen at Seneca Lake, O. September 17 (ME). The 70+ usually fed at Chester, W.V. returned this year. Observers' opinions differed as to numbers and diversity of duck species. Bill Bartolo felt that the migration near Youngstown, O. was poor while John Smith of Beckley thought the late season was the best in years. **Mallards** and **Black Ducks** moved through mostly during late October and early November. Only one report of **Pintail** - 3 near Canonsburg November 19 (R&MH). One male **Green-winged Teal** was noted at Washington, Pa. November 12-24 (SH) and **Blue-winged Teal** were seen at Terra Alta, W.V. September 30 (JB). **Am. Wigeon** were reported from Washington October and November (SH & R &MH) and near Youngstown, O. November 19 (BB). Smith saw at least 28 **Wood Ducks** in two places near Beckley early in the season (September 17) and submitted the last report - 2

drakes at Hinton November 18. A pair of **Gadwall** were seen at Evans Lake near Youngstown, O. November 19 (BB). Two **Redheads** were noted at Washington October 29 (R&MH) and nearly 100 near Hinton, W.V. November 22-23 (JLS). Several reports indicated **Ring-necked ducks** moved through the entire territory from late October to late November. Sixty **Canvasbacks** were seen in Hinton area November 22-23 (JLS). **Lesser Scaup** were observed from October 16 to November 23, the largest flock (70) being at Washington October 16 (SH). **Common Goldeneyes** were reported from Morgantown November 12 (GH) and Hinton November 18 (JLS). First **Buffleheads** were noted near Youngstown, O. October 27 (BB) and observation continued throughout the period, heaviest in mid and late November. **Ruddy Ducks** were reported from Princeton, W.V. October 17 (JP) and Seneca Lake, O. October 22 (ME). **Hooded Mergansers** mentioned were 60 in the Hinton area November 22-23 (JLS). **Red-breasted Merganser** population was termed normal by Mabel Edgerton. She found 80 at Seneca Lake November 24.

Vultures and Hawks - There were a few **Turkey Vultures** still within our area at the end of the period at Athens, W.V. (JP), and Columbiana Co., O. (NL). It is difficult to recognize the migrants during "hawkwatches" because of their manner of flight, but I like Mrs. Laitsch's quote: "several **Black Vultures** were seen among hawk flights at Peter's Mountain, most continued Southward and local population did not build up while we were there." "Hawk counts" are often a good index to population but are subject to weather conditions. At most locations this fall counts were less than sensational but at Peter's Mountain in Monroe Co., W.V., a total of 5484 were logged in nine days. The total of 273 **Sharp-shinned Hawks** seemed the outstanding feature. **Kestrels** were still in lower than normal numbers due to last winter's losses. Most other species were in normal numbers within our area.

Gallinaceous birds, Shorebirds and Gulls - Reports for **Bobwhite** varied from "scarce" (BB) to "a good breeding season" (LW). **Ruffed Grouse** observations also varied from "low" on Dolly Sods (KF) to "good supply reported by Berkeley Co., hunters" (CM). The **Turkey** hatch and survival appeared good in W.V. First report of Am. **Coot** migration was from near Youngstown, O. (BB) October 25. Some Coot were still in the area at the end of the period. Two **Semi-palmated Plovers** were seen at Seneca Lake O. September 11 & 24 (ME). **Killdeer** appeared to have a good breeding season but were still lower than 1976. Virginia Johnson found a **Golden Plover** near Uniontown, Pa. October 22, **Snipe** reports were meager and ranged from October 8 (JP) to November 20 (BB). Mrs. Laitsch reported **Spotted Sandpipers** at Mt. Davis, Pa. September 10, Terra Alta, W.V. September 17 and Monroe Co., W.V. September 22; also **Solitary Sandpipers** at Terra Alta, W.V. September 2. The last **Greater Yellowlegs** was reported near Youngstown, O. October 27, and the last **Lesser Yellowlegs** from the same area October 25 (BB). Mabel Edgerton found 3 or 4 **Pectoral Sandpipers** at Seneca Lake, O. October 15 and considered the number smaller than normal. The two **Dunlin** found there October 2 and 15 were also considered very few (ME). An **Am. Avocet** was found near Youngstown, O. September 17 (BB). Herring Gulls were considered normal on Seneca Lake (ME)., and **Ring-billed Gulls** normal on the Ohio River (ERC), but Edgerton considered **Bonaparte's Gulls** fewer at Seneca Lake.

Doves, Cuckoos and Owls - Most observers agreed that **Mourning Doves** had made a good recovery from last winter. Last report of a **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was from the Youngstown, O., area September 26 (BB)., and last for **Black-billed Cuckoo** from Bethany, W.V., in early September (JB). There were no reports of **Barn Owls,** but **Barred** and **Great Horned Owls** seemed to be present in normal numbers. The **Screech Owl** population is way down.

Goatsuckers, Hummingbirds and Kingfishers - **Common Nighthawks** had a good

migration with the last report from Youngstown, O. October 8 (BB). Leon Wilson noted that **Whip-poor-will** populations were very low. There was also a good migration of **Chimney Swifts,** last date October 20 at East Liverpool, O. (NL). Last date for **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** was September 17 in Milliken, W.V. (HG). **Belted Kingfishers** seemed scarce during the early part of the season but were more noticeable this fall. This indicates a successful breeding season.

Woodpeckers and Flycatchers - A few **Common Flickers** were still in the area at the end of the period. Norris Gluck felt that all woodpecker populations were down in the Charleston, W.V. area, but Hullet Good listed **Pileated Woodpecker** as fairly common at Milliken, W.V. Reports of **Red-bellied Woodpecker** were mixed - about normal. Only one report of a **Red-headed Woodpecker** - a juvenile near Grandview State Park, near Beckley, W.V. September 24 (JLS). **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** seemed scarce, first report date was September 29 near Charleston (NG). **Hairy Woodpeckers** continue to be scarce, but Clark Miller feels that they are on the increase in Berkeley Co., W.V. **Downy Woodpecker** populations appear normal. A few **E. Phoebes** remained in the area at the end of the period, one was at Glenwood Park, Princeton, W.V. (JP). George Hall contributed the only record of **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher,** in Morgantown September 17. The last record of an **Acadian Flycatcher** was at Bethany, W.V. September 1 (JB) and last record for **E. Wood Pewee** September 14 near Youngstown, O. (BB).

Swallows and Corvids - Two late **Barn Swallows** were seen at Canonsburg October 8 (R&MH). About 50 **Purple Martins** were in Huntington, W.V. September 6 (LW). The number of flocks of **Blue Jays** seemed lower on Dolly Sods this fall, but there were noticeable migration movements on East River Mountain and at Peter's Mountain in Monroe Co., W.V. (JP). Norris Gluck also documents two noticeable movements in Coonskin Park Charleston, September 9 and October 11. Clark Miller notes that **Common Crows** are decreasing in Berkeley and Jefferson Counties and that **Common Ravens** are increasing. The increase in Ravens coincides with an increase over the entire Appalachians.

Chickadees through Wrens - Good numbers of **Black-capped Chickadees** moved into the area around mid-October (GH) (NL). Mrs. Laitsch cites normal numbers of **Carolina Chickadees** during the summer. Then they diminish during fall and winter. She raises the question of whether our summer residents move farther south during winter, any banders have the answer? Two reporters (ERC&NG) felt that **Tufted Titmouse** populations were down, George Hall felt they were almost back to normal after two low years. **White-breasted Nuthatches** are also back to normal after a low year or two. The **Red-breasted Nuthatch** migration could be termed early and good, one appeared at East Liverpool, O. September 8 (NL) and Barnesville, O. September 12 (ME). There seemed normal populations of **Brown Creepers** in migration. One sang at Terra Alta, W.V. September 18 (NL). A **House Wren** was noted at Morgantown October 2 (GB). George Breiding felt that **Winter Wrens** were down from last year and Hall noted low numbers in the mountains this summer and suggested it might be the result of winter kill. Clark Miller noted the absence of **Bewick's Wrens** in the Eastern Panhandle. Hullet Good probably sums up the situation on **Carolina Wrens** when he says they "are slowly making a comeback," most reports are still from south of Parkersburg, W.V. **Long-billed Marsh Wrens** left the Youngstown, O., area early - September 21 (BB). Bill Bartolo sighted a flock of **Water Pipits** near Youngstown November 13. They were gone in two days.

Mimics and Thrushes - A few **Mockingbirds** are still wintering in the areas involved in a range expansion perhaps 20 years ago. They now move to feeders in the winter. We should note whether the eradication of Multiflora Rose causes the species to

retreat to it's range of 30-40 years ago. Doug Jolley found two Mockingbirds in Burnsville, W.V. November 19. A late **Gray Catbird** was seen at Clarksville, Pa. October 3 (RKB). The last report of a **Brown Thrasher** was of one banded in Morgantown November 6 (GH). The fall flight of **Am. Robins** was described as excellent, tremendous, etc. Several reporters were still seeing a few at the end of the period, but the bulk was through by the first of November. A **Wood Thrush** was still singing at Milliken, W.V. October 7 (HG). The fall flight at Morgantown and A.F.M.O. was described as light (GH). The **Hermit Thrush** flight was also termed as very light (GH), while the **Swainson's Thrush** apparently had a good season. There was a late migrant at Kanawha Forest near Charleston October 29 (HG). Most **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** moved through the area between September 12 and October 10. Numbers banded were low (GH). Most reports were of normal numbers of **Bluebirds.** One very large flock, probably migrants, was seen in Ohio Co., W.V. October 24 (AD).

Kinglets and Waxwings - Most observers felt that both species of **Kinglets** were down in numbers this fall. This reflects George Hall's observation that **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were low in the breeding areas in the mountains this summer. A flock of **Water Pipits** was at Seneca Lake, O. October 15-22 (ME). **Cedar Waxwings** were plentiful until mid-November, 180 were counted in one tree at Bethany, W.V. November 8 (JB). **Loggerhead Shrikes** were observed in South Branch of the Potomac Valley in W.V. (JLS) (KF).

Vireos and Warblers - A **White-eyed Vireo** was still singing at Terra Alta W.V., September 18 (NL) and the last date for both White-eyed and **Yellow-throated Vireos** was at Milliken, W.V. September 25 (HG). A late **Solitary Vireo** was seen and heard near Wadestown, W.V. October 29 (GB). Opinions on warbler migration were mixed but most species had a good year with few "waves." George Hall, commenting on activities at A.F.M.O., thought the tremendous increase of **Bay-breasted Warblers** the most significant thing, followed by the continuing increase in **Cape Mays** and **Tennessees.** He feels this must surely reflect the recent outbreaks of Spruce Budworm in the north. A **Black-and-white Warbler** was seen at Morgantown October 2 (GB). A.R. Buckelew reported numbers of **Tenessee Warblers** at Bethany, W.V. September 18. **Nashville Warblers** were seen from September 10 to October 2. Many **Yellow Warblers** were noted near Pipestem Park, W.V. October 11 (OJ). September 9 set a new high of 62 for **Magnolia Warblers** banded at Dolly Sods. **Cape May Warbler** migration began in August and continued through October 15. Reports show an excellent migration of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** during October. The **Black-throated Green Warbler** migration was long, peaking about September 19. **Blackburnian** migration occurred in August and early September. A **Yellow-throated Warbler** was noted at Milliken, W.V. September 17 (HG). **Blackpoll** migration stretched from late August through October 7. **Pine Warblers** were still in good song at East Liverpool, O. September 28-29 (NL). Ralph Bell banded a **Palm Warbler** of the rare eastern race October 11 in Clarksville, Pa. A late **Common Yellow-throat** was noted at Wadestown, W.V. October 22 and a **Hooded Warbler** October 2 at Morgantown, W.V. (GB). The largest tower kill of combined species occured at Youngstown, O. September 12 (BB).

Blackbirds and Finches - One of the delights of the fall season was the report by George Flouer of seeing **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** near Keenan, Monroe Co., W.V. Two were seen October 3 with beef cattle, one on a steer's back. Another was seen October 14 while George was accompanied by Polly Ballowe. A 10,000 bird roost of **Blackbirds** was present in Morgantown until the leaves fell from the roosting trees, then all left at one time (GH). A **Rusty Blackbird** was reported from Canonsburg, Pa. November 30 (R&MH). Bill Bartolo reports **Common Grackles** from Youngstown, O., area dropped from 5250 October 22 to 40 November 19. Both **Tanagers** were

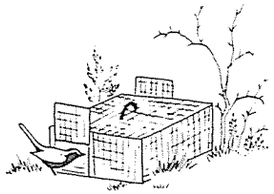
present at Milliken, W.V. October 10 (HG). Norris Gluck felt that **Cardinal** populations were down at Coonskin Park near Charleston. **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** were noted through September, and one immature male was at Canonsburg, Pa. October 7 (R&MH). The last **Indigo Bunting** record was at Milliken, W.V. September 11 (HG). The invasion of northern finches is most spectacularly illustrated by **Evening Grosbeaks.** Two dates, September 11 and 17 were early sightings (JP & GB), but the bulk of the migration occurred around October 15-30. Carolyn Ruddle and the author witnessed this just outside Franklin, W.V. Two-hundred and fifty were counted in one flock. Several flocks were seen that morning, but the possibility of their being part of the larger flock was not discounted, even though some miles separated sightings. First **Purple Finch** sightings were reported from Gilmer Co., W.V. October 4 (NG). Mabel Edgerton, who first discovered **House Finches** in Barnesville, O., last year, now has 10-16 daily at her feeder. Ralph Bell banded his first one at home October 29. There were two reports of **Common Redpoll,** two at Morgantown November 12 (very early) (GB) and three in Fredricktown, Columbiana Co., O., in late November (ERC). There were several reports of **Pine Siskins** between Oct. 20 and 31, the first from Clarksville, Pa. October 11 (RKB). **Goldfinches** are reported to be plentiful. There were two reports of **Red Crossbills:** nine visited Laitsch's Acre on October 24, and the Finnegans saw nine September 9 on Rt. 33 at the Va. - W.V. line. These latter birds have been seen here at other times and are thought to be a breeding population. Two flocks of **White-winged Crossbills** were also noted. Art Dunnell reported six at Bethlehem, near Wheeling October 30, and Emery Froelich and Roger Higbee saw one at the Washington, Pa., cemetery November 25.

Sparrows - Clark Miller banded 12 **Savannah Sparrows** October 10-14. First **Dark-eyed Juncos** were noted at Carnifax Ferry September 25 (HG). The main flight seemed to be in the first two weeks of October. **Tree Sparrows** presented a puzzle. None were reported all fall at Morgantown (GH), while they were considered fairly common in East Liverpool, O. - Chester, W.V. area (ERC). A **Chipping Sparrow** wave was noted at Bethany, W.V. September 11 (JB) and in numbers at Pipestem Park September 10-14 (OJ). Last **Field Sparrow** reported was at Wadestown, W.V. November 19 (GB). George Hall notes that he normally bands quite a few at Morgantown, but had only one this fall. The **White-crowned Sparrow** flight appeared late and in low numbers. Greater numbers of **White-throated Sparrows** appear to be wintering in our area. There were four reports of their arrival in September, September 15 near Youngstown, O., being the earliest (BB), but September 18 as far south as Ripley W.V. (HG). Although most sightings of the **Fox Sparrow** were reported from late October to mid-November, Kathleen Finnegan had an early sighting October 6. Clark Miller banded ten **Lincoln's Sparrows** in the Eastern Panhandle of W.V. October 10-14. The last **Swamp Sparrow** was reported from Washington, Pa. November 25 (R&MH).

Contributors - Bill Bartolo (BB), Ralph Bell (RKB), George Breiding (GB), Micheal Breiding (MB), Dr. A. R. Buckelew (JB), E. R. Chandler (ERC), Arthur Dunnell (AD), Mabel Edgerton (ME), Kathleen Finnegan (KF), George Flouer (GF), Norris Gluck (NG), Hullet Good (HG), Dr. George Hall (GH), Marjorie Hefner (MH), Roger and Margaret Higbee (R&MH), Sarah Hugus (SH), Oliver Johnson (OJ), Virginia Johnson (VJ), Douglas Jolley (DJ), George Koch (GK), Nevada Laitsch (NL), Clark Miller (CM), Jim Phillips (JP), Carolyn Ruddle (CR), J. Lawrence Smith (JLS) and Leon Wilson (LW).

BANDING NEWS

Ralph K. Bell, Editor
R.D. 1 Box 229
Clarksville, Pa. 15322



Youngstown, Ohio - In my early days of bird study, I considered the American Goldfinch to be a summer resident that departed from northern Ohio in the fall and reappeared the following spring. In late April or early May, I often noted flocks of Goldfinches in the blooming apple and pear trees or on the lawns near our home. Migrant warblers and vireos in the same trees competed for insects and made bird watching exciting. What nature observer could miss the bright yellow plumage of the males and the sweet "chickoree" calls of the Goldfinch?

But, bird banding has provided me with a considerable amount of information concerning Goldfinches. While it is true that some do migrate southward in the fall, a considerable number brave the cold and snows of Ohio and winter here. The main problem is to find food. I found that they like sunflower seeds and stay around as long as the seeds last or until about May 8 or thereabout. Some bird banders report that Goldfinches cannot handle the size of the sunflower seeds so they trap them in greater numbers if the seeds are put through a food blender and this makes the seeds more acceptable. Not so for the Ohio birds; they have no difficulty in handling the sunflower seeds.

Unlike Tree Sparrows which return to feeding stations in Ohio winter after winter after having been banded, only a few Goldfinches have returned to me. One was a female, banded on April 7, 1970. She returned each of the two following years, being found in the traps March 4, 1971 and January 5, 1972.

On February 17, 1962, I placed band No. 102-73983 on a male Goldfinch and was pleasantly surprised to get a recovery the next year. Mr. and Mrs. Howard K. Meahl live near Ashtabula, Ohio and band large numbers of birds in both traps and nets. They reported catching this bird on April 26, 1963. I have visited their station and found it most interesting. The distance from Willoughby, where the bird was banded, to Ashtabula is about 40 miles, air line.

The probability of this ever happening again, with a population of only about 400 Goldfinches, is very small; but it did! On April 12, 1971 I banded a male Goldfinch with band No. 107-88571. This one was captured by the Neahl's on December 29, 1971.

Now that we have moved to Youngstown, I wonder if Goldfinches trapped and banded here will be found near Ashtabula by my fellow banders there. It just could be.

Merit B. Skaggs

Knox, Pa. - Enjoyed reading Cora Williams account of the House Finch in Indiana, Pa. **(Redstart,** October 1977, page 120). The House Finch is continuing to move West. We live approximately 50 miles northwest of Indiana. I banded my first four on April 8, 1977 (three of these were adult males).Three days later I caught and banded another male. Then on April 23, 1977, I banded still another AHY male plus one of unknown sex.

On April 30, 1977, a lady in the town of Knox told me some "red" birds were building a nest in her awning. She said the birds had built in the same place in 1975 and agian in 1976 (when they raised three young). However, the birds did not finish the nest in 1977, but moved across the street and built in another awning (Kool Vent).

I found a total of four House Finch nests this year - three were in awnings and one in a speaker (under an awning). The first nest was in the corner of an awning and fledged four young. Then they built in another corner and fledged two young (I did not band these). The nests were made of small sticks, miscellaneous grasses and small pieces of Hemlock boughs. They were very messy as all droppings were put on the outside of the nest and on the ground below (I have seen Goldfinch nests in the same messy condition).

So far I have counted 23-25 House Finches in Knox. Last spring (April 1977), a few came to a feeder about two miles south of Knox. Then this fall they showed up at Carl Rowe's feeder (2½ miles south of Knox). We live another half mile south of Carl but have not noticed any at our feeder yet.

Walter Fye

Clarksville, Pa. - American Kestrels have been nesting here since I put up my first nest box for them in 1957, and a total of 72 nestlings have been banded over the ensuing years. But this summer (1977) was the first time we have ever had two nest boxes occupied. They were only about 300 yards apart. The availability of suitable nest sites probably caused them to nest too close together.

The nest box on the top of the hill (box A) had a full set of five eggs before April 10 and the box near our yard (box B) contained five eggs before the end of April. Only one egg hatched in box A but all five hatched in box B. There is the possibility that most of the eggs in box A were infertile as the male may have deserted. I didn't notice a male near the box A after a male and female were seen at box B.

When I checked box B on May 8 for a visiting group of school students, an unbanded male was sitting on the eggs. He didn't try to fly so he now wears band #1013-07482. The young were banded on June 12.

Kestrels were a problem for our Barn Swallows this year. Kestrel box B is only about 200 feet from our barn which contains numerous nesting swallows. When I came back from the Foray on June 11, my wife Betty said the Barn Swallows were restless and continually chasing the Kestrels. I soon found the reason. An adult Kestrel was going in the barn and a nearby shed and was taking young swallows to feed its own young. Several nests were empty and two had been completely torn down. This called for quick action, so I put some 1x2 inch mesh wire screening over the two windows used by the Barn Swallows (and the Kestrel). A hole 6 inches high and 14 inches wide was cut in the wire screening for the Barn Swallows to use. It worked as the Kestrel seemed afraid to fly through such a small opening.

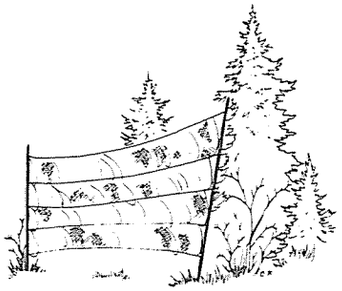
The young of other birds in the yard didn't seem to be as bothered as they were last year. One reason may have been because a pair of Kingbirds had a nest in a Sycamore tree only 100 feet from the Kestrel box and the Kingbirds were boss over much of the yard.

At least two of the young Kestrels in box B had left the box by June 26 and all were gone by the end of the month. The box faced a locust tree about 100 yards away and that was the goal as each young left the box. After a few days they started to fly from tree to tree, and soon they were in the scattered trees on the ridge above our house. Here they practiced and learned skills that help determine their future. Many times on early July mornings, as I sheared Christmas Trees, the distress calls of Meadowlark would be heard as a young Kestrel would strike it on the ground. No doubt it was more of a practice game than hope of catching a prey. But as the young get older, this practice can be a valuable asset when the need and opportunity arises.

The main diet of the Kestrel is mice and insects but they will take birds if readily available - especially when the demand of their young is great. B. H. Warren, in **Birds of Pennsylvania,** (1890), page 141, states that the stomach contents of 65 Sparrow Hawks (American Kestrel) that he dissected showed, in 31, principally field-mice, with frequent traces of various insects; 23, mainly grasshoppers and beetles; seven, small birds; two, Meadowlarks; one had the remains of a mouse and small bird and one contained insects and a small bird.

I'll admit our Kestrels probably caught a female Eastern Bluebird that nested nearby. Also, the wings of a male Red-wing Blackbird were found in the nest-box. But redwings are abundant throughout the area and Bluebirds are common. We should not condemn the Kestrel for taking a few birds. Increasingly people are learning to appreciate the role of predators in the scheme of things. We should do everything possible to aid all birds of prey, they have taken the abuse of man for far too long already.

Ralph K. Bell



Book Reviews

Watching Birds: An Introduction to Ornithology by Roger F. Pasquier. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston 1977. 301 pp. Illust. Price $9.95.

This book was written to satisfy the average bird-watcher who might wish to have a better understanding of bird study. Although the various subjects covered are discussed at a rather simple level, they are the same subjects covered in more advanced ornithology textbooks. The topics included are bird origin, evolution, anatomy, physiology, behavior, song, migration, distribution, conservation and how to attract and care for birds. Over 100 attractive drawings by Margaret LaFarge compliment the text.

Although "Watching Birds" is packed with facts, they are mostly distributed in the written text. There are not many tables organizing facts for reference. One might prefer Wallace and Mahan's "An Introduction to Ornithology," MacMillian, New York, 1975, which is as well written as the book reviewed here, while offering more facts and a more profound consideration of bird study. For the beginner, who wants to read brief accounts of the most important concepts of modern ornithology or for the young reader, Pasquier's book should serve well.

Ways of Wildlife prepared by The Wildlife Society and edited by Eleanor Horwitz. Citation Press, New York, 1977. 160 pp. Illus. paperback. Price $3.95.

"Ways of Wildlife" was written to provide an idea book for school teachers, camp counselors, scout leaders and others who need to interpret wildlife principles for children.

Each chapter provides background on one important aspect of wildlife study, several related activities to be carried out by students and a list of concepts to develop. Topics emphasized include the uses of wildlife, how to talk to children about wildlife, habitat needs, conservation and animals in the classroom.

The activities are sophisticated and designed for maximum learning. Activities for any age group can be chosen from each chapter. They include using weed seeds in a bird feeder, experiments with oil and duck feathers, use of questionaires and nature games. Most of the suggested activities are original and fun.

The list of concepts at the end of each chapter are clear and easy to understand. The means for providing an exciting wildlife program in the classroon is furnished by this inexpensive book. Although "Ways of Wildlife" was compiled by a committee, it is well written throughout.

Fifty Common Birds of Oklahoma and the Southern Great Plains by George Miksch Sutton. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1977, 133 pp, 50 illus. Price $7.95.

Most of the 50 species featured in this little book are common inhabitants or migrants in West Virginia as well as Oklahoma. The few that are not seen in West Virginia are worth knowing and include Oklahoma's state bird, the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Roadrunner, Mississippi Kite, Painted Bunting, Dickcissel and Harris' Sparrow. The descriptions include a discussion of plumages, song, call notes, behavior, habitat, similar species, nest and eggs of Oklahoma breeders, and advice on how to find and observe. All of the above is done in a delightful, conversational style which will please the general reader. Most descriptions include an interesting anecdote from Dr. Sutton's vast field experience. As always he is a great story teller.

A full-page color plate of a Sutton painting of each bird faces the page of text about that bird. Some of the paintings were first published in Todd's "Birds of Western Pennsylvania" and an early edition of "The World Book Encyclopedia." The quality of the prints is good. The University of Oklahoma Press is to be congratulated for managing high quality while keeping the price at a low $7.95. There is a complete list of the birds of Oklahoma at the back.

A. R. Buckelew, Jr., Editor

A Letter

To the Editor,

I am writing to you in reference to a note by Phillips (1977 Redstart 44:82) concerning the status of the Yellow-headed Blackbird in the State of West Virginia. Mr. Phillips noted that sighting records reported by Handley, Brooke and himself do not meet the criteria for a state record. I wanted to point out that there is a state record of the Yellow-headed Blackbird in West Virginia.

This species was photographed at Huntington in June of 1960. The bird was an adult male in breeding plumage. Copies of the photograph were submitted to George Hall and to Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and identification was verified. Hall noted this record in the "Supplement to The List of West Virginia Birds" (1973, Redstart 40:103) where he designated the status of the Yellow-headed Blackbird as "Accidental Visitant."

Roy S. Slack
Terrestrial Environmental Specialist, Inc.
8398 Oswego Rd. Liverpool, N.Y. 13088

Request For Information

Purple Martin Color-marking

A large scale continent-wide Purple Marin color-marking project was initated in 1977. Observers are asked to look for and report any color-marked (plastic leg bands and/or wing tags) Purple Martins. Please record the color of the bands or wing tags, which leg they are on, age and/or sex (if either is known), where and when observed, and whether the bird was in a roost, staging flock, migratory flock or at a nest site (scouting or nesting?) We are especially interested in the movements of young birds and their return to the parent colony or nearby colonies. All reports will be acknowledged and should be sent to Ms. Kathleen Klimkiewicz, Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland 20811.