

# FEATHERS

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## CHIPS

By Halsey W. Kline

One spring morning about a year ago I was awakened by the rhythmic tapping of a woodpecker. Peering out of my bedroom window I finally saw him, a big fellow with a radiant red cap, fly to the top of a power pole and peck on it for some minutes. Apparently satisfied that the pole would not meet his requirements he disappeared into the foliage.

Home for lunch at noon I heard him again -- a continuous tapping from the vicinity of my apple tree. I stealthily eased out under it, but farther on I observed a shower of chips falling into a bed of ferns, growing under a big elm tree.

At first I thought my presence would drive Chips, as we later dubbed him, away, but he didn't seem to mind in the least and kept right on, boring a hole about a foot from the top end of a sawed-off elm stub.

Never having had the opportunity of getting a close-up of a woodpecker in action, my curiosity was most enthusiastically aroused. I had heard stories which sounded rather absurd, but this experience more than substantiated the best of them. I am not exaggerating when I liken the effects produced by Chips to a fair-sized waterfall. The chips were coming so fast that there was a continuous stream of them, fanning out at the ground some four or five feet. The bird was good-sized, about 12 inches from head to tail, as near as I could judge, but even so the results that he achieved seem most uncanny to me. Investigation showed that a typical chip was fully an inch long and half that in bulk.

From all appearances that evening it seemed as if our new friend had given up his endeavors. I could see a hole near the top of the shortened trunk, and suddenly I heard a hollow knocking sort of sound, different from the previous one. I decided Chips had finally drilled his way into the elm and was finishing off on the inside.

All of a sudden a red-capped head appeared in the aperture with a bundle of chips in the long beak. These he flipped into the air with a toss of his head before he again disappeared. Soon he returned with another load. Then the tapping started again within the tree.

The following day saw a repetition of this procedure, over and over again. Then for quite a spell all was quiet. For about a week I did not see Chips again, and I thought our friend had given up and departed.

## Enter Mrs. Chips

One day during the following week, hearing some raspy sounds above me, I was agreeably surprised to see our red-capped friend clinging to the elm bark at his hole and jabbering away at something within. Suddenly the head of another bird popped out of the hole. This one did not have a red cap but was about the same size as Chips, with rather speckled plumage. I finally decided that this was Chips' wife and that the new home had met with her approval.

From observations made I have determined that the life of the woodpecker is an orderly, systematic one. On numerous occasions I have seen Chips fly to the tree and let out a raspy squawk, whereupon the female would come out and fly away while Chips would go in and keep the nest warm until the Mrs. returned from her shopping or lunch. Invariably Chips did not leave the nest until the Mrs. returned.

About three weeks later a day came when pandemonium reigned in Chips' corner of the yard. Interference with a neighbor's garage had made it necessary to remove a section of Chips' elm, and tree surgeons were busily at work.

I glanced up to Chips' hole and wondered how he would take this. In the shadow of the opening I saw the blazing top knot with a long beak protruding from it. Evidently the noise worried Chips, but for the present he was keeping quiet.

But when one of the men climbed high in the tree to remove a limb, it was too much for Chips, who apparently wondered if he was going to have any tree left. With a raucous squawk he shot out of his hole, and a one-arm battle ensued between the man and the bird. Emitting his most ferocious rasps, Chips dived again and again at the man. Exasperated, the tree man whipped out with the end of a rope he was holding, and Chips, seeing the futility of the situation, flew to a nearby birch tree. Hopping from branch to branch he cursed the men the remainder of the time they were in the tree.

Their work finally completed, the men departed, and Chips, after cooling

off, returned to his tree. That evening I made a mistake I have since regretted more than once -- I told my neighbor she had a nice family of woodpeckers in the elm. "How delightful!" she exclaimed. "I have a niece who is a great lover of birds, and I shall have to tell her about it."

After dinner a few days later I was struck dumb to discover the trunk of Chips' tree had been sawed off six feet shorter. Doing a little sleuthing I finally discovered Chips and his family, in the sawed-off section, leading the life of a totem pole within full view of my neighbor's house. That section of the tree containing the nest had been removed and placed in prominent display in close proximity to the next-door home.

The woodpeckers have never come back.

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 Editor's Note: Mr. Kline frankly admits he knows nothing about birds, and his article, therefore, may contain some descriptions of the woodpecker in question which are confusing to bird students. His story is so interesting, however, that we prefer to let him tell it in his own way.

#### A CALL FOR YOUR RECORDS

In 1933 there was published "A Preliminary Check-list of the Birds of Eastern New York," in which the information was briefed as much as possible. An expanded and revised issue of the booklet was issued in 1937. While each of these booklets served the purpose in mind, it is, of course, true that they are not up to date; more records have been made available by still other observers, some items where there were questions are now revised, and new territories have since been studied.

Plans have been completed for a revision of the check-list, to be published as a series of articles in FEATHERS and covering all available records through 1938. It is hoped that observers having records beyond those in the 1937 booklet will make them available immediately to the Records Committee so that the series of articles will be all-inclusive. -- G. E.

#### WREN PERVERSITY

Frank Randall, the artist responsible for the very attractive decoration on the first page of this publication, is quite fond of birds and for many years wished he could have wrens nesting about his home on the Saratoga Road. He was told he'd never have wrens until he built wren houses for them.

So last year Frank built a wren house, and sure enough a pair of wrens spent the summer at his home. But they didn't nest in the wren house; they set up housekeeping in the little building with a crescent on the door.

#### A NEW VISITOR

By B. D. Miller

"There is no satisfaction," says a modern philosopher, "like that of having put salt on the tail of an idea." With bird students there is similar satisfaction or enjoyment, so to speak, in putting salt on the tail of a new bird which has never been seen before or which is found in a territory where it has not previously been reported as a resident.

During the present year many in Schoenectady had this privilege, when the mockingbird suddenly appeared in the town of Niskayuna. And, now that the bird has been positively identified, news comes to us that it may have been here since the summer of 1938, because several people have seen one or more birds, whose description closely checks, within the radius of a mile of where it was identified. One observer reports having seen three that he mistook for shrikes.



The Mockingbird at Mr. Miller's Feeding Station

When a mockingbird first appeared at my feeding station on Myron Street, along with tree sparrows, nuthatches, chickadees, and purple finches, several amateur observers were perplexed to name the stranger. We were slow in suspecting it to be a mockingbird, taking for granted the species had never approached nearer than a few hundred miles of this vicinity. Here we were wrong, because Mr. Bartlett's "Birds of Eastern New York" includes two reports of mockingbirds having been seen near Albany -- once by Mr. Eaton in 1900 and again by Mr. Houghton in 1928. These recorded facts at least show they are rare birds in this part of New York State.

At first our bird was shy, giving us only occasional glimpses, but after a few days he became much tamer, so that

we were able to get within 10 or 15 feet of him. By April 1 he was so tame that a group of several local ornithologists was given excellent views and was able to take photographs at various angles. He actually sang for us that day, thus making it clear he was a male. He behaved so well then and for several days following -- coming around when visitors called, allowing numerous photographs to be taken, and giving repeated vocal concerts -- that we said he was giving a few public exhibitions.

After staying with us for several weeks, he disappeared suddenly during April. We have had no positive report from him since, although Mr. J.M. Hollister tells us that a friend, who knows the mockingbird well, heard one singing near the Mohawk Golf Club.

Records show the mockingbird as a native of the eastern U.S., ranging far enough north along the coast to include nearly all the New England states. The birds do not migrate but spend the whole year where fortune locates them, although there is evidence of their extending the area they have occupied during past years. The one or more seen here may be the vanguard of a new bird species for this locality; if so, I am sure they will be welcome.

Mockingbirds have won a warm place in the hearts of many who have become acquainted with them in their native surroundings. Few birds have played a more prominent role in our folk songs and literature. Of them, along with two others, John Burroughs says in his delightful literary craftsmanship: "The catbird, the brown thrasher, and the mockingbird are all theatrical in their manner -- full of gestures of tail and wings -- and their songs all imply an audience." Longfellow pays this famed singer a compliment, as we read in "Evangeline":

"Then from the neighboring thicket the  
mockingbird, wildest of singers,  
"Swinging aloft on a willow spray that  
hung o'er the water,  
"Shook from his little throat such  
floods of delirious music,  
"That the whole air and the woods and  
the waves seemed silent to listen."

#### WAS IT A VULTURE?

On Sunday, May 6, local bird enthusiasts, as usual, congregated in numbers in Central Park to look for warblers. It was a good day, and, although the season had started oddly, still the prospects were that the morning should bring some worth-while observations.

Nobody was prepared, however, for the one finding which caused such sharp division of opinion among observers and which bids fair to go down in local bird history as the Great Vulture Controversy.

On the Eastern Avenue side of Stump Pond, beyond the swampy woods, Observers Janiec and Havens were looking for warblers. In the general vicinity of Stump Pond itself Observers Bedell and Steele

were together in one spot and Observers Reeves and Van Vorst were in another point of vantage. Apparently simultaneously all saw a number of hawks in the air, one of which immediately claimed particular attention.

When your editor first saw the bird it was about 100 feet above the head of Joe Janiec. Its tremendous wing spread and dark coloration caught our attention immediately, and our first thought was to identify the bird as an eagle. Calling it to Joe's attention brought forth the excited cry: "Vulture!" At about the same time we noticed the red head and spoke of it. Joe replied by calling attention to the smallness of the head and the pattern in the wings. Meanwhile the bird was climbing higher and higher into the sky, and soon it was so far away that further identification study was difficult.

A check later with Ed Bedell and Roy Steele indicated that the master minds were by no means in agreement. Ed and Roy felt strongly that the bird was not a vulture. Neither of them saw the red head, and Bedell particularly remarked that the vulture wing pattern was lacking.

On the other hand Nelle Van Vorst and Frances Reeves confirmed the Havens-Janiec diagnosis. Miss Reeves felt that her considerable experience with vultures in the South entitled her views to some consideration. As opposed to this Roy Steele, who has also had a good deal of southern experience with the vulture, is quite as confident that what he saw was not a vulture.

And there the matter is likely to rest. Nobody had the forethought to be provided with a rifle in order to bring down the specimen, and it begins to look like a matter of opinion. And, in such cases, one can always fall back on the old argument: "You didn't see the same bird that I saw!"

#### 1938 IN REVIEW

In the cases of about three dozen species of birds, records established during 1938 in the local area were of particular interest because of the rarity of the species, because they were found unexpectedly as wintering, or because of new maximum arrival or departure dates.

Many of the dates, particularly of the vireos, warblers, and oriole, can probably be attributed to the extremely warm weather prevailing through mid- and late April. In addition to the dates indicated, many additional species were within one or two days of all-time records during late April and early May.

Also high-lighting the year's records were four special investigations, which will be repeated again this year. One was a Christmas Census, recorded in full in Bird-Lore. Another was the first local breeding census, also reported in detail in Bird-Lore, with Schenectady placing high in comparison with other

sections of the country both with regard to density of population of the area investigated and the number of species included. The other two investigations had to do with the mid-summer bird populations of high-altitude local areas. One, a red-spruce, swampy area at 2,000 feet elevation, was investigated by ornithologists from Albany and has now appeared as a Cornell University report. A survey of a woods at 1,500 feet was also made during the year.

The 1938 records for Schenectady and vicinity beyond those listed in the 1937 edition of "Birds of Eastern New York":

American Crow - Arrived July 4.  
 Lesser Scaup Duck - Departed June 4.  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk - Arrived March 12 (Havens).  
 Virginia Rail - Arrived April 14.  
 Florida Gallinule - Arrived April 22.  
 Ring-billed Gull - Transient on March 20.  
 Mourning Dove - Arrived March 12 (Schaefer); also winter visitor 1938-1939.  
 Yellow-billed Cuckoo - Arrived May 6.  
 Saw-whet Owl - Recorded June 29 as summer resident at 2,000 feet (Uttal).  
 Brown Creeper - Recorded in mid-summer at 1,500 feet (Havens).  
 Nighthawk - Arrived April 26 (Steele).  
 Flicker - Winter visitor, 1937 - 1938, at Ballston Lake (Bedell).  
 Kingbird - Arrived April 29 (Bedell).  
 House Wren - Arrived April 18 (Moore).  
 Brown Thrasher - Arrived April 20 (Allen, Stone).  
 Robin - Few visitors each winter.  
 Veery - Arrived April 16 (VanVorst).  
 Bluebird - Two small flocks of winter visitors, 1937-1938 (Freese, Bedell).  
 Yellow-throated Vireo - Arrived April 16 (Moore).  
 Blue-headed Vireo - Arrived April 24 (Moore).  
 Warbling Vireo - Arrived April 19 (Bainbridge).  
 Orange-crowned Warbler - Two transients, Kasakayana, May 7.  
 Nashville Warbler - Summer resident at 2,000 feet (Uttal).  
 Yellow Warbler - Arrived April 28.  
 Magnolia Warbler - Common summer resident at 2,000 feet (Uttal).  
 Myrtle Warbler - Arrived April 20 (Hall).  
 Black-throated Green Warbler - Arrived April 27.  
 Blackburnian Warbler - Arrived April 28. Summer resident at 1,500 feet (Havens), and at 2,000 feet (Uttal).  
 Prairie Warbler - Apparently established as summer resident at Karnaers. Twenty or more singing males, plus females, through June and seen carrying food in July (Bedell); colony a mile long and very narrow. Similarly recorded during 1937 (Bedell, plus others from Albany).  
 Canada Warbler - Arrived May 7. Very common summer resident at 2,000 feet (Uttal).  
 Baltimore Oriole - Arrived April 30 (Bainbridge).  
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak - Arrived May 8.  
 Purple Finch - Common summer resident at 2,000 feet (Uttal).  
 Redpoll - Departed April 11.  
 Henlow's Sparrow - Arrived April 26 (Steele).  
 Abundant summer resident at 2,000 feet (Uttal).  
 -- G. B.

#### DIRECTORS ELECTED

At the first regular meeting of the Schenectady Bird Club, held May 22 in the Schenectady Museum, a board of directors was elected for the first term in office. The by-laws of the organization provide for seven directors, each to be chairman of a committee, and these were elected as follows:

Education, Alice Holmes; Conservation and Sanctuaries, G. H. Bainbridge; Publications, Barrington S. Havens; Bird Records, Guy Bartlett; Junior Associates, Frank Freese; Finance, Chester N. Moore; Secretarial, Nelle Van Vorst. Immediately upon election the Board held a meeting of its own and elected Mr. Havens chairman.

#### NOTICE OF OUR NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Club will be held June 26 at 7:45 o'clock in the Schenectady Museum. An open session is planned on the subject of warblers, to be illustrated with colored pictures of the birds and lantern slides. It is expected that the subject will be of interest not only to active bird students but also to those generally interested in birds. There will be no admission charge, and the public is invited. Come and bring your friends for an interesting and educational evening.

#### RIISIVE

It's an old, old story, this business of looking for a bird all over and finding it in your own back yard. We've told all who would listen how, in the early days of our bird apprenticeship, we looked high and low for a screech owl only to find one nesting in a tree just across the way from our home.

Latest anecdote of this type concerns J. M. Hollister of Stratford Road, who spent the winter in Florida looking for the mockingbird in order to take colored pictures. One night he came home to his hotel and picked up his Gazette to read an illustrated story about the mockingbird which was such a regular visitor to B.D. Miller's feeding station this past winter.

#### BLUE EGG SHELLS

When you find fragments of a blue egg shell on your lawn, don't decide too quickly that a robin left them there. Starlings lay blue eggs too; although there's a difference between starling and robin eggs, it's easy to be fooled if you aren't careful.

#### HOW BIG IS A FLOCK?

One local observer, commenting on the heavy migration of winter wrens this spring, said that, although he had never seen more than two of this species at one time before, he had seen a whole flock of them in the cemetery this year. Asked how many there were in the flock, he replied: "Three."

# FEATHERS

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## THE EGRETS ARE DUE

By Guy Bartlett

THE AMERICAN egrets have already come north from their southern breeding swamps, and again are being seen along the wide waters at Niskayuna and other favored places. Four of them were seen there July 4 by C. N. Moore, who also recorded two of them there on June 17. Ordinarily the egrets do not arrive until mid-July, and an early record date was established last year when they were also seen July 4. It is possible that the birds seen June 17 were stragglers only, since none was recorded between then and the Fourth.

Last year their arrival date was the earliest ever: July 4. This year an even earlier date was recorded when C. N. Moore saw two of the birds at Niskayuna on June 17. However it is possible that those two were stragglers only, since they were not recorded after that.

It is hard to realize that the bird was threatened with extinction about a third of a century ago. Plume hunters ravaged the breeding grounds -- and it is only the breeding bird that has the egret so much in demand for millinery use, worth more than its weight in gold, and now banned. Vigilant wardens guarded the few remaining birds, slowly they regained their numbers, and today it can be considered that their remarkable comeback is complete. Today the American egret is to be found as a summer wanderer far to the north of its breeding grounds and in increasing numbers each season -- and its breeding grounds are also being expanded northward.

Even while records of egrets were indeed rarities in other sections of the North, Schenectady was being visited regularly by at least a few of the species. In fact in only one year since 1920, or possibly earlier, has the bird not been found along the Crescent Lake section of the canalized Mohawk River. None was seen there in 1934.

Egrets were first seen by the writer in that section in 1930, at which

time information was obtained from several independent sources showing the birds had been regular summer visitors there for at least 18 years. Only two of them were seen in each of the first few years, but in the late 1920's the count varied from four to eight per season. Since 1930 the usual season had been from mid-July until late September. The earliest arrival date (other than the two stragglers of June 17 this year) was July 4, 1938, with three observed. The latest departure date was in 1937, when for the first time the birds were recorded in October (through October 10, one day after the duck-hunting season opened). Counts of recent years have shown ten in 1930 (July 19 to September 20), five in 1931 (early September only), one in 1932 (September 1), 12 in 1933 (July 9 to September 17), none in 1934, two in 1935 (August 5 to 24), 14 in 1936 (July 20 to September 29), 27 in 1937 (July 9 to October 10), and 11 in 1938 (July 4 to September 20).

Niskayuna records of the little blue heron have been far less frequent. One in immature (white) plumage was observed there August 16, 1931, and three, likewise immature, by Edgar Bedell September 12, 1937.

In addition to the regular records at Crescent Lake there have been less frequent but increasingly numerous visitations of the egret to Watervliet Reservoir. Late summer usually finds the lake with wide expanses of exposed mud flats, and it is the most popular local site for shore birds. Watervliet Reservoir records have included September 10, 1921 and August 5, 1923 (Houghton), August 2 to 24, 1925 and September 9, 1931 (Bedell), four during 1933, five during 1936, and three during 1937. One was seen there November 14, 1937 by Helle Van Vorst a few days after small pools had been ice-covered.

One egret was recorded early in the morning at the lake in Central Park July 18, 1932 (Bedell). In most recent years the egrets have extended their local territory to include the river above Lock 7, particularly at Collins Lake and in the vicinity of the islands west of

Gateway Bridge. Four were seen there in 1936, seven fed there regularly in 1937, and there were at least four there last summer. That these birds may roost with the others of the Crescent Lake section is indicated by the many times egrets have been seen in flight over the city.

In the past few years egrets have been recorded throughout the Mohawk Valley and along Adirondack and central New York lakes. Some of these records have included: a few above and below Amsterdam and two at Sprakers in 1933, two above Amsterdam in 1936, three at Fonda in 1937, two at Saratoga Lake in 1933, one at Delmar in 1936, one at Blue Mountain Lake in 1936, one at Delmar July 28, 1937, and a few at Goodyear Lake, Otsego County, in July, 1937.

Recent additional records for the little blue heron have included, besides one in mature plumage at Waterford April 13, 1922 (Bedell), the following immature birds: one at North Creek August 4, 1931, two at Saratoga Lake in August, 1930, and one at Watervliet Reservoir August 5, 1923 (Houghton).

Daytime trips on the New York Central Railroad to New York City in July and August usually reveal egrets, particularly in the swamps of Stockport and Hudson. In spite of the difficulties encountered in a count from a train, 53 were counted along the Hudson in July, 1933, most of them well to the north of Poughkeepsie and with not more than six in any one group. Similar observations in 1934 indicated somewhat fewer of the birds; 1935 train records showed the birds more numerous, with ten seen at once at Stockport; 1936 records were similar; and in August, 1937 a count of 82 was made on a trip from Albany to New York, while 76 were seen on the return trip two days later.

For many years there has been a colony of black-crowned night herons on the Saratoga side of the Crescent Lake section, and it is in this heronry that most of the egrets seem to collect at night. Great blue herons are not known to breed in the immediate vicinity, but they are common summer residents in that section. Green herons and American and least bitterns are breeders there.

EDW CLOSE to Schenectady are there breeding colonies of cliff swallows and purple martins? If you know of 1939 colonies nearby, please notify the records committee.



FEATHERS is published monthly by the Schenectady Bird Club and goes to members. Your contributions and suggestions for improvement are solicited.

#### Dues

Active members, \$2 per year  
Associate members, \$1 per year  
Junior members, 50¢ per year

Barrington S. Havens, Editor,  
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#### AN EARLY MORNING BIRD COUNT

THE next time you lie abed early some Saturday or Sunday morning, restlessly wishing for sleep to come, try a trip to some nearby point for early song records. The following were made on an occasion of this sort from the crest of a hill about five miles from the city, early in June. They were all made by ear. Times given are daylight saving.

4:10 - immediately upon arrival two field sparrows were heard singing more or less incessantly, with two whippoorwills vocalizing just as actively in the distance.

4:15 - a song sparrow and a robin took up the refrain, while a prairie horned lark could be heard somewhere in the air above.

4:20 - after a brief tanager song another robin raised his voice.

4:25 - a brown thrasher, a chipping sparrow, and a towhee joined the chorus.

4:30 - within the next five minutes a veritable army of birds was heard: the wood thrush, indigo bunting, catbird, northern yellowthroat, and crested flycatcher. The whippoorwill and lark had stopped singing.

4:35 - the voices of the Nashville warbler and yellow-breasted chat joined in, the latter singing an extensively varied song.

4:45 - a chestnut-sided warbler and a veery sang.

4:50 - the "fee-bee" song of the chickadee was heard for the first time, and the "flee-sick" of the Henslow's sparrow came faintly from nearby.

4:55 - a house wren poured out a

cascade of silvery notes from a not-too-distant farm.

5:00 - in rapid succession were heard the phoebe, bluejay, and ovenbird.

5:05 - grackles were flying overhead, a crow cawed in the distance, a black and white warbler whistled in a nearby wood, and a kingbird screamed.

5:15 - a cowbird spoke as he flew over, and a downy woodpecker drummed not far away.

5:25 - the beady notes of the cedar waxwing betrayed his presence as he flew overhead.

5:30 - a Baltimore oriole greeted the rising sun.

5:40 - a black-billed cuckoo and a golden-winged warbler were heard almost simultaneously.

5:45 - a single goldfinch sang "per chickeree."

5:55 - a redstart voiced his sharp, peremptory song.

6:00 - the first red-eyed vireo was heard.

6:15 - a Canada warbler warbled tardily.

6:20 - latest riser was the wood pewee.

6:30 - the observer went home to breakfast and called it a day.

Starting May 7, 1939 the site was visited three times -- but no birds! On May 14 a single male was found and three other single males over a stretch of one mile, but not a one in the old colony -- which had been burned out last winter.

May 21 the original site was still vacant, but the other birds were still there in the new locations. By May 24 at least 15 singing males had been found scattered in an east-west line from the Karner's site to a point one mile north-east of Guilderland.

In every case the male was singing from a tall tree on the south slope of rolling, scrub-covered, cut-over, open hillsides, the brush being shoulder high and composed of oak, sweet fern, blueberry, and pitch pine. Associated birds were always chestnut-sided warblers and towhees, with a few field sparrows and thrashers.

The song is unique and instantly identified: a metallic, screepy series of six or seven "zees" running up the scale, the last few more hurried than the first four notes. It sounds like the rapid strokes of a saw file imitating an olive-backed thrush. No other song is like it, but it is similar in lazy drawl to the black-throated blue and black-throated green warblers' song. It has about half the volume of that of the chestnut-sided warbler and is much higher in pitch.

These birds perch out in the open, allow a close approach, and are in constant song.

#### COMMENTS ON THE SEASON

By Guy Bartlett

A QUARTERLY feature of FEATHERS is to be a seasonal summary of local bird records, showing the winter, spring, summer, and autumn reports. In the case of this first summary, two seasons are included: winter and spring.

#### Winter

High lighting the records of the past winter were those of the Barrow's golden-eye, redhead, and mockingbird.

Old records indicated that Barrow's golden-eye might logically be expected as an occasional winter visitor in open waters, but in recent years there had been only one questioned record of the bird. Field trips in which the Barrow's golden-eye was particularly sought were frequently made to the open parts of the Hudson above Troy, and on February 20 of this year H.V.D. Allen and Rud Stone were

#### A PRAIRIE WARBLER COLONY

By J. Edgar Bedell

IN MID-MAY, 1937, Dr. Homer D. House, state biologist, wrote me that he had seen a prairie warbler in the Karner section of pine bush and that Dr. Bronson of State Teachers College in Albany had observed one in the same section several years before. On May 20 to 24 a lone singing male was found by close search at the place described, and this was the only bird I found that year.

In 1938 the first birds to arrive came on May 18 -- five males and two females. By June 1 I had located 20 singing males and many females; during the next six weeks the colony was visited many times.

After the first week in July the birds suddenly disappeared. I never saw one again, although the territory was thoroughly searched several times.

successful in finding a male of this species in a flock of American golden-eyes in the open water above the dam at Stillwater. The bird was easily observed from the bridge there. On February 24 the bird was seen again by the two observers, and on the following day a number of Schoenectady observers were successful in adding the bird to their life lists.

The February 25 trip also revealed that a male redhead duck was wintering with the more usual ducks at Stillwater. There had been no previous record of the species as a local winter visitor. The redhead was observed on subsequent trips but the Barrow's golden-eye was not seen after the 25th. Incidentally, the trip on the 25th also included the usual record of a mature bald eagle on its customary early-spring perch beside the open stream above Waterford.

The story of the wintering mooking-bird was told last month (page 2).

Other items of interest during the winter were the abundance of redpolls and their late departure date: April 18; two records of wintering field sparrows by Steele, January 15 and March 19 (this species arrived as a transient or summer resident on April 14); and a wintering bluebird (reported to Moore Feb. 19).

#### Spring

One spring is like any other spring so far as bird records are concerned in only one respect -- in being different -- and the spring of 1939 was no exception.

In the first few days of March the weather was unseasonably warm, whereupon a few redwings, grackles, bluebirds, and other early migrants were recorded, but then colder weather set in, and about two more weeks elapsed before the migration was continued. In general the weather through the spring was deficient in temperature so that, particularly when compared with the spring of 1938, arrival dates were late.

Redpolls, purple finches, and evening grosbeaks were particularly common during the late winter and early spring, and the redpoll established a new departure date (April 18 - Stone).

Ducks were common this spring as migrants, compared to 1938, remaining through mid-May. A further increase in ring-necked ducks was particularly noticeable. Ring-billed gulls were here in a large flock in mid-March, outnumbering the herring gulls in some sections.

A turkey vulture was recorded on May 6 (FEATHERS, page 3).

The height of the season for the warblers was attained May 20. Far more than the usual list of these birds was recorded, and many species ordinarily seen but seldom were observed on several occasions. Among the unexpected warblers were: Connecticut (Overstreet, May 13), orange-crowned (Janice, May 11, and Bartlett, May 20 and 30), worm-eating (numerous records), yellow-throated (Janice and Havens, May 20), cerulean (Overstreet, May 13), prairie (again established as summer resident at Kamor), and yellow-breasted chat (several records).

Among early arrival dates for various species were: rusty blackbird, March 6; field sparrow, March 19; great blue heron, March 23; and baldpate, March 25.

#### JUNE MEETING WELL ATTENDED

A TURN-OUT of between 40 and 50 attended the June meeting of the club, in the hall of the Schoenectady Museum. After a brief business meeting a talk was given by Mr. Havens on the subject of wood warblers.

As June 26 was the last date on which one could become a charter member, the rolls of charter membership were closed the night of the meeting.

#### OUR NEXT MEETING

ONE OF the most perplexing groups of birds for all but the quite advanced student is that of the sparrows. Particularly is this true when it comes to the savannah, grasshopper, Henslow's, and the similarly inconspicuous members of this large and interesting family. To many it is almost a case of considering every sparrow in the field as a song sparrow and every one in the yard as either an English or a chipping sparrow.

Ability to recognize the different sparrows is not hard to attain, for each kind has particular little traits, markings, or songs. At the next Club meeting (7:45 o'clock on July 31 in the auditorium of the Schoenectady Museum) Guy Bartlett will discuss the sparrows, finches, and related species, dealing particularly with field identification and local distribution.

A FEEDING station in Niskayuna last winter and spring had 22 bird species as feeders. Beyond that, ten kinds of mammals were also visitors.

# FEATHERS

Published by the Schenectady Bird Club

August, 1939

Vol. 1 No. 3

## BIRD LIFE STUDY IN A SPRUCE SWAMP

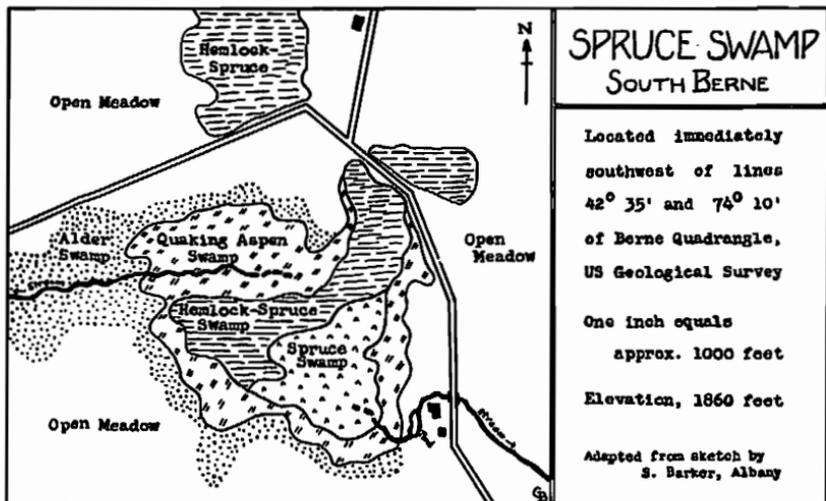
By Chester N. Moore

LAST YEAR the attention of certain Schenectady bird students was called to a report of a preliminary survey of the bird population of a spruce swamp in the Helderbergs near Berne. The report (as yet unpublished) was prepared by L.J. Utal and Stephen Barker of Cornell University and Kenneth Keroher, Jr. of St. Lawrence University. They had spent three days of June, 1938 surveying the flora and fauna of the swamp, which, because of its peculiar character, offered interesting possibilities for summering records of birds characteristic of the Canadian Zone. This year two groups of Schenectady Bird Club members have made two one-day trips to the swamp, one on May 11 and the other June 24, continuing the survey so successfully initiated.

The swamp in question covers about 80 acres in the southwest corner of Berne Township about four miles from the village of South Berne. As indicated on the accompanying map, it is constituted

mainly of a core of swampy woodland bearing mostly red spruce trees, surrounded by forest belts of hemlocks, aspens, alders, etc., open cultivated fields, abandoned farm buildings, and country roads. Such boreal plants and shrubs as sphagnum moss, pitcher plants, creeping cranberry, Labrador tea, sheep laurel, and high-bush blueberries are abundant in the spruce area, and most of the remainder of the wooded portion is covered with fairly dense underbrush. This swamp represents, in all probability, an ancient pond that has gradually become overgrown by vegetation.

The three surveys so far made of this area have yielded a total of 78 species of birds. Of these eight were observed by Utal and his group only: sharp-shinned hawk, ruffed grouse, woodcock, screech owl, saw-whet owl, rose-breasted grosbeak, Henslow's sparrow, and slate-colored junco. (Continued on Next Page)





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#### Dues

Active members, \$8 per year  
Associate members, \$1 per year  
Junior members, 50¢ per year

Barrington S. Havens, Editor,  
63 No. Brandywine Avenue

Fifteen species were added to the Utal list by the Schenectady group this year: red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, alder flycatcher, least flycatcher, red-breasted nuthatch, warbling vireo, Nashville warbler, myrtle warbler, Louisiana water thrush, northern water-thrush, bobolink, English sparrow, Baltimore oriole, grasshopper sparrow, and white-throated sparrow.

Thirty-six species were recorded on each of the three visits: Cooper hawk, marsh hawk, killdeer, ruby-throated hummingbird, flicker, pileated woodpecker, downy woodpecker, kingbird, phoebe, wood pewee, barn swallow, bluejay, crow, black-capped chickadee, robin, veery, bluebird, starling, red-eyed vireo, black and white warbler, magnolia warbler, Blackburnian warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, ovenbird, northern yellowthroat, Canada warbler, redstart, meadowlark, redwing, cowbird, purple finch, goldfinch, towhee, vesper sparrow, chipping sparrow, and song sparrow.

Species recorded during two of the three trips total 24: sparrow hawk, mourning dove, black-billed cuckoo, chimney swift, hairy woodpecker, crested flycatcher, white-breasted nuthatch, house wren, catbird, brown thrasher, hermit thrush, cedar waxwing, black-throated blue warbler, black-throated green warbler, northern water thrush, Louisiana water thrush, Baltimore oriole, bronzed grackle, scarlet tanager, indigo bunting, savannah sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, and field sparrow.

These records indicate the interesting variety of birds to be found summering in or near a swamp of this character. The presence of such birds as the red-tailed hawk, saw-whet owl, red-breasted nuthatch, magnolia warbler, myrtle warbler, and white-throated sparrow is an indication of Canadian Zone

characteristics. The hermit thrush, pileated woodpecker, black and white warbler, Nashville warbler, Blackburnian warbler, Canada warbler, purple finch, and junco are not common in the lower areas of the territory of the Schenectady Bird Club. In June fledglings of the Canada warbler were seen, a family of young pileated woodpeckers was calling lustily from the tops of tall hemlocks, and young ovenbirds were being fed as they attempted their first flight thru the woods.

These preliminary surveys have produced such interesting records of bird life that members of the club intend to keep the region under observation during future seasons.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Some preliminary study has also been made this year of another spruce swamp, at a lower elevation, also in our territory, and we hope to present a report on this in an early issue.

#### BIRDS YOU WILL NEVER SEE

By Alice Holmes

IT WAS a quarter of a century ago - on September 1, 1914, at the Zoological Garden in Cincinnati -- that the last surviving passenger pigeon died. Books have been written about the tragic history of this bird, a century ago counted by the billions and fifty years ago already threatened with extermination at the hand of Man.

With the 25th anniversary of the last pigeon in mind, the next meeting of the Schenectady Bird Club -- a meeting to which the public is invited -- will deal with "Birds You Will Never See." Participating in the program will be George H. Bainbridge and Malcolm W. Rix.

The passenger pigeon is not the only bird unknown except by hearsay to the bird observers of today. There are the Carolina parakeet, the Eskimo curlew, and the heath hen which also have become extinct within a half century; and there are the great auk and Labrador duck as birds extinct still longer. Still other species have been so reduced in numbers that their survivals are questionable. The trumpeter swan, whooping crane, California condor, and ivory-billed woodpecker are such birds. Concern is also expressed for the survival of many more species, including various ducks and geese, shore birds and persecuted hawks.

At the meeting on August 28 in the auditorium of the Schenectady Museum at

8 o'clock Mr. Bainbridge, conservation chairman of the Schenectady Bird Club, will present the story of many of these birds -- birds you will never see.

Also featuring the program will be the exhibition of Mr. Rix's collection of models -- or, better, exact replicas in wood and brass -- of a pair of passenger pigeons and of a pair of Labrador ducks, as well as some of his models of other birds, such as the common tern, bob-white, and chickadee. He will also display the mounted male passenger pigeon he owns and which served as the model for his reproduction. It is an interesting story that Mr. Rix has to tell in his models -- a story that is briefly told and pictured in Popular Science Monthly for August.

Feel free to bring your friends to the meeting with you.

#### NOTES FROM CORNELL

By Edna Becker

ALTHOUGH Dr. Allen is not here this summer, ornithology activities at Cornell are much the same as usual. Mrs. Allen and Dr. Kellogg are holding forth in the general and applied courses (the latter is largely bird photography). I am glad I took Birds of the World last year because of Dr. Allen's absence. But, even though I'm not taking any ornithology courses, I spend considerable time in the department, especially in the library, where I'm looking up the literature on the brown thrasher (its life history is the subject of my thesis for an M.S.).

Dr. Allen is at the University of California, teaching and doing quite a bit with sound recording of western birds. Incidentally, Mr. Albert Brand, author of the bird song records, gave a talk the other night on his work and illustrated it with slides showing how it is done and what the sound recordings look like. He also played some of the records. The recordings of insect and frog sounds were just as interesting as those of bird songs.

A visit to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Brand one evening recently was just as interesting as his lecture. I came away with useful information about the brown thrasher, two of the victrola records, and a report of his experiences two years ago in Schenectady while attempting to get sound recordings of the upland plover. His diary recalled to his mind the names of Bartlett and Havens as having been on hand to assist him. The

Schenectady trip was one of his last field excursions, since he has practically been an invalid ever since.

There is an ornithology seminar every Thursday night. Most of the time, after going over the A.O.U. check-list to report all birds seen around Ithaca during the previous week, is devoted to reports by graduate students on the progress and problems of their theses. Last week we heard about the pileated woodpecker and last night, its relative, the ivory-bill. Jim Tanner has been working on the ivory-bill for nearly three years under an Audubon Association fellowship, so he had an interesting report to give us. Next week we shall have the pleasure of witnessing some of the bird sound-films taken by the department. Most of us have seen them before, but that fact only increases our enthusiasm.

A report of ornithology doings at Cornell wouldn't be complete without mention of the Saturday field trips. We are looking forward to one next week, when we go to Spencer Marsh. an excellent meal and songs around the campfire always top off the field trips.

#### ABOUT THIS ISSUE

FOLLOWING the standard practice of many magazines, the pages of FEATHERS are being numbered consecutively from issue to issue. In this issue, for example, you will notice that the first page is No. 9, carrying on from the last page of the preceding issue. The first page of the last issue was No. 5, carrying on from the last page of our first issue, which started with No. 1. Each year we plan to start a new volume, and the page numbering will start all over again.

A number of complaints were received, following the publication of the first issue, that the type was too small to be easily readable. Starting with the second issue, a little more space was allowed between lines, and this improved matters so much we are continuing it. We can make the type still larger if necessary, but that means less material in any given issue, and we can't afford yet to add any more pages.

SEIDOM commented on in books is the way in which the red patch on top of the head of the male hairy woodpecker sometimes is divided down the middle by a streak of black.

SHADOWS OF DEATH

By Guy Bartlett

HOUSE WRENS are notorious destroyers of nests, as is attested by the number of punctured eggs of other birds so often found in neighborhoods where the wrens hold forth. Not so well known is a similar trait on the part of the long-billed marsh wren. The house wren picks on various birds indiscriminately; the marsh wren, on the other hand, seems to specialize.

During the course of the annual breeding census being made on Nisk, an island in the Crescent Lake section of the Mohawk River (which censuses are published in Bird-Lore), a least bittern nest was under observation. Built part way up on oat-tails in a wet part of the marsh, the nest contained four eggs and had been incubated nearly a week. The nest was at the edge of a somewhat open spot in the middle of the vast marsh and it was possible for observers to watch the nest from across the opening, a matter of a dozen feet or so.

One day on a trip through the marsh the nest was approached quietly during the absence of the parent bird. Hopping from one oat-tail to another right beside the nest was a marsh wren. Finally one of the hops took it to the nest itself, and quickly it reached over the edge. A quick motion on the part of the observers flushed the wren into fluttering flight over the oat-tails, but an inspection showed the damage had already been done. Two of the eggs were freshly punctured.

A glance through the literature revealed the happening was not unique. It seems that the least bittern nest is a speciality with the marsh wren.

During the course of the summer's investigation two other least bittern nests were found to contain broken eggs, but it does not necessarily follow that these had been punctured by wrens.

A DAZED WOODCOCK

By C.N. Moore

THE hunter usually goes into the country to hunt for the woodcock. The process was recently reversed, for one afternoon in late May Mr. C. H. Droms of Bedford Road in the heart of the city heard some object strike the back of his house and roll down across the tin roof of the back stoop.

Upon investigation he found a mature male woodcock lying stunned on the lawn. The bird slowly recovered from the shock and apparently suffered no permanent injury, for, when released the following day, it lost no time in heading for the "wide open spaces" where it is usually extremely adept at dodging obstructions, as every hunter knows.

AN ORIOLE EPISODE

ORIOLE NESTS, suspended from and securely fastened far out on the high branches of elms, will usually resist the efforts of any wind to blow them down. Less fortunate than usual was one of the pairs of these golden robins that nested this year in the elms on the lawn of the Troy Road home of H. B. Marvin. An early June wind tore one of the nests from its branch, and the crash to the lawn brought death to one of the tiny, helpless young.

The clamor of the parents called attention to their plight, and the nest was placed, after removal of the dead bird, in a low, ornamental evergreen. Immediately the parents accepted the new conditions and proceeded with their numerous trips back and forth from treetops to nest with food-laden bills.

Late that afternoon another clamor was raised by the birds, for their nest was again being disturbed. The evergreen site offered no protection from cats or squirrels. Mr. Marvin raised a ladder to the lower branches of the elm and tied the nest securely to one of them.

Again the nest could swing gently with the breezes, and, if baby orioles become accustomed to rocking cradles as do sailors to rolling ships, the young birds again felt at home. The parents quickly accepted the new conditions, and in the few remaining days before their fledglings were ready to try their wings normalcy reigned. -- G.B.

THE TWO families of birds having the most extensive and varied local representation are the Compothlypidae, or wood warblers, and the Fringillidae, or grosbeaks, finches, sparrows, and buntings.

A CAROLINA wren, according to a recent item in Nature Magazine, stayed at Lake George through autumn, winter, and spring.

# FEATHERS

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## DAM CLEVERNESS

By Guy Bartlett

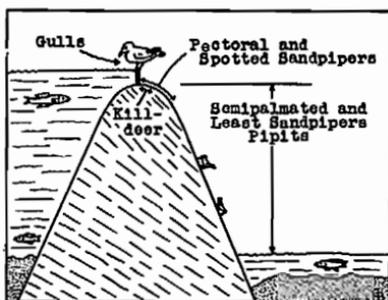
"MUD FLATS" are the places to which bird observers usually travel to see the shore-birds and waders - places like the Watervliet Reservoir, with its wide expanses of mud and moist loam left bare by the receding waters of late summer.

Trips to such mud flats well repay the visitor. Recent seasons have also paid visitors to Look 7 of the Barge Canal, for each year has had shore-birds in hardly to be expected activities in places far from flat. Across the river beside the lock is a dam, of concrete and with a two-foot splashboard along its top. There is a difference in water level of nearly 30 feet at the dam. Down the sloping, rough surface of the dam there is usually only a slight flow of water in early autumn, the operation of the lock and the power-generating station on the opposite shore requiring most of the water. The result is that on the face of the dam there is a growth of water plants, attractive to insects.

Sandpipers and plovers in years past discovered the possibilities of the dam as a feeding place. Semipalmated and least sandpipers climb up and down the entire face with impunity, seldom slipping or having to flutter their wings to keep from sliding down. Spotted and peitoral sandpipers are less at home on the steepest part, and only occasionally are seen to descend below the upper part of the curved top of the dam.

It is the killdeer which puts on the most interesting display, however. Lacking the hind toe of the sandpipers and having a partial web, it is not able to handle itself except on the relatively narrow part of the top which is practically flat. Frequently it starts to run along with the sandpipers, only to slip and, with characteristic cry, flutter into flight back to the top.

Gulls, too, are regular visitors at



the dam; and they also have to remain on the level face. However, they prefer to perch atop the splashboard, facing upstream and watching for what the waves may bring.

Sandpipers are not the only birds to have been seen on the steepest part of the dam. Later in the autumn there are frequently pipits, but the records of these visitors have been irregular.

OF THE nearly 300 species of birds which have been recorded locally at one time or another 47 per cent, or nearly half, are in the order Passeriformes, or perching birds. Birds are divided into 20 orders, according to the classification adopted by the American Ornithologists' union.

IT'S NOT always an easy matter to tell the downy from the hairy woodpecker by size alone. The tail markings are an identification key, but they are usually hard to see. A better field mark is often the bill, that of the downy being short, and that of the hairy, relatively long and powerful.

## MORE SHADOWS OF DEATH

By Guy Bartlett

THE STORY of the marsh wren and the least bittern (page 12) is not the only tale of Death in the Marsh. During the breeding census the island marsh also revealed another death struggle. The observers were on the main shore of the river, looking across the channel to the shallow water, so densely carpeted with water-chestnut, bordering the island. A Florida gallinule was working and feeding along the shore, followed by a half dozen half-grown chicks. Most of the time the chicks were behind the mother bird, but occasionally one or another would rush forward, running easily over the water-chestnut leaves, and feed in front of the parent.

All at once the column of birds was augmented by another, a half-grown Virginia rail, which took its place at the tail end of the procession. It was only a matter of a few seconds before the rail was seen by the adult gallinule, and the gentle clucking of the parent bird quickly gave way to a loud clamor as the gallinule rushed back.

The gallinule chicks ran quickly into the cover of the cat-tails, and the rail ran out, over the water-chestnut leaves, toward the channel. The infuriated gallinule, with outstretched neck and flapping wings, quickly caught up with the rail, pounced on it, pushed it down into the shallow water, and struck at it several times with its bill. With lessened clamors it then returned to the shore, assembled its brood, and continued the trip along the shore.

The river channel separated the observers from the spot where the action had taken place, and it was several minutes before the spot could be reached. The fight had well marked the spot, however, and it was an easy matter to recover the battered, bleeding body of the young rail. Hard blows to the head had apparently resulted in its death.

A Happy Family

While on the subject of the fights between birds it is interesting to note that the struggle is not necessarily between species. Leaving the Nisk marsh and crossing the river to the wooded swamp where for years black-crowned night herons have nested abundantly, one sees a colony of birds which at casual glance seem to be a "happy family," at peace among themselves and with their nests so close to each other in the dead

trees in the center of the swamp only because they prefer each other's company. Actually, however, they are almost at war with one another.

Right from early spring the bickering, bill-snapping, and jostling are in evidence. The pairs of herons set up individual territories, and woe to the bird who alights on a branch already claimed by another. And, as the nests are built, there are further quarrels. All help themselves to the twigs remaining in the previous year's nests and, too, to the material in nests under construction, provided the nest owners are both away.

Later there is a period of relative quietness, while the eggs are incubated and while the nestlings are very young. Then the only disturbances seem to be when the herons usurp perches.

Still later, however, come death struggles. The young begin to climb among the branches, and to trespass on the territory of others. It is no uncommon sight then to see the young bird jostled from the branch if it fails to retreat to its own territory -- perhaps jostled by a neighboring parent or by larger young. On the other hand, if the wandering young bird is larger than those in the adjoining territory, perhaps it jostles the smaller ones from the nest or branch, usually to the ground and to death. In mid-summer the ground in the swamp is strewn with the bodies of young herons, but of course territorial scraps are not entirely to blame. Some have been pushed from the nests by their own brothers or sisters, some have simply fallen by themselves while learning to climb, and still others died in the nests and were removed. On the whole, however, it seems that the scraps between different broods contribute heavily to the death toll.

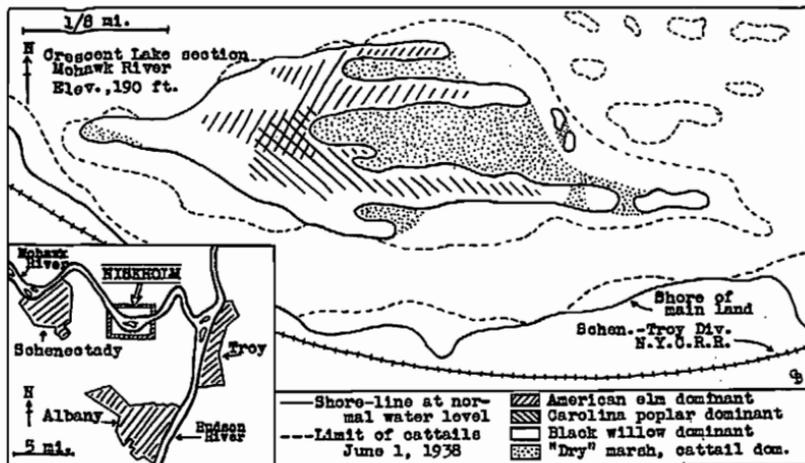
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REFERENCE has been made (p. 12) to the warblers and the sparrows and kin as having the most extensive and varied local representation. Equally numerous locally are the Anatidae, including the ducks, geese, and swans. In fact, species of ducks, etc., recorded in recent years have outnumbered sparrows, etc.

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"LIFE HISTORIES of North American Woodpeckers" by A. C. Bent is now available, at 50 cents, from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. It is U. S. National Museum Bulletin 174, and is the 12th of the series.

## NISKHOLM - AN ISLAND WHOSE BIRDS ARE COUNTED



BIRDS OF NISKHOLM\* have been counted for the second successive year in connection with the Breeding-bird Censuses of The National Association of Audubon Societies, as published in the September-October issues of BIRD-LORE.

For the possible use of those who may intend to conduct similar censuses of other areas or to participate in future investigations of the island, the BIRD-LORE reports for 1938 and 1939 have been combined in the following.

**Description:** Niskholm is a lightly wooded, marsh-bordered island, approximately one-half mile in maximum length and one-fifth mile maximum width, at an average of 260 feet from the main shore. American elm, Carolina poplar, and black willow are the dominant trees, and there are no evergreens. The trees average less than 30 feet in height, with a few of about 80 feet maximum; are about six to ten inches in diameter, with a few of 18 inches or more in diameter; and with considerable dead wood standing and on the ground. There is a minimum of land without trees, and it is a matter of only a short time before all will probably be covered. The substratum is mostly dense, with gum-grass, jewel weed, nettles, and sensitive fern dominant. There are considerable amounts of wild grape and osprey and other climbers. About two acres are densely shaded and damp, and without substratum growth.

A shallow marsh surrounds practically all the land. Cattail is dominant in the marsh, which is mostly bordered with bar reed and arrow-head. The shallow marsh, particularly in the bays at the lower end of the island, are gradually becoming dry, but still support cattail growth. Willows are gradually extending to form islets.

Until late May the water beyond the marsh is open, but by mid-June is covered with water chestnut (*Trapa natans*), and by mid-July is choked with it, even where the water is ten feet deep. The water-chestnut growth seems to aid in the spawning of various fish, and birds are attracted. Green Herons, Least Bitterns, Gallinules, and Sandpipers walk over the dense growth; Waxwings, Swallows, and other species feed on insects on and above the growth. Muskrats, water snakes, and snapping turtles are found on and around the island. It is state-owned, and has a minimum of interference by man.

In 1939 there was some change in vegetation, in that the storm in the late summer of 1938 felled several large poplars; a year's growth added to the density of the woods; and the drought of the year added to the dry marsh.

**Size:** About 21 acres of wooded land, and 25 acres of marsh (both dry and wet) containing cattails.

**Coverage:** 1938 - Preliminary trips in April and early May; 22 trips from mid-May to mid-August, with six observers and 147 man-hours, including evening, daybreak and night trips. 1939 - Preliminary trips in late April and early May; ten trips from mid-May through July, with 6 observers and 83 man-hours.

\* NISKHOLM exists on the topographical map only as an unnamed island; but since it promises to be of continued interest to bird observers it has been named. It is at Niskholms, and holm is an Anglo-Saxon term for a river island.

**Location:** In Crescent Lake section of canalized Mohawk river, in northeastern Albany County, at junction of Schoenectady and Saratoga Counties. The river is 3/4 mile wide, at 190-foot elevation.

**Topography:** The island resulted from the canalisation of the river about 25 years ago, when the water level was raised several feet by the Crescent Dam; previously it had been "flood lands" of the river. None of the land is more than five feet above normal river level, and it is usually flooded in the spring and partially flooded after exceptional rains. Much of the marsh is shallow, with deep-muck bottom. A minimum of the land is more than 300 feet from the marsh, and most of it is within 75 feet.

**Edge:** The island is very irregular in shape. It has approximately 11,000 feet of edge of land bordering marsh or water, and 5400 feet of marsh to water.

**Survey:** The island has been visited regularly, all seasons, since 1930.

**Weather:** 1938 - Previous winter open; some temperature and precipitation excesses during breeding season. The exceptionally warm weather of late April brought the land birds well in advance of normal schedule, and land plants were about two weeks early. April was the warmest in 13 years, with a temperature excess of 29°. May had a temperature deficiency of 29°; June had an excess of 37°; July was the coolest in six years; and early August was about normal. The average temperatures: April, 50.2; May, 58.4; June, 69.2; July, 73.3. Precipitation: April, 2.19 inches; May, 2.72; June, 3.41; July, 4.26. 1939 - Winter about normal, but spring retarded. The opening three months of the year had a precipitation excess of two inches. In April there was a temperature deficiency of 125°; there were eight inches of snow; the average temperature was 42.7°, four degrees below normal; and rainfall was 3.5 inches, one inch above normal. May was the driest in at least 20 years, with the rainfall only 0.87 inch, more than two inches below normal. Following a temperature deficiency in the first few days, there was built up a tempera-

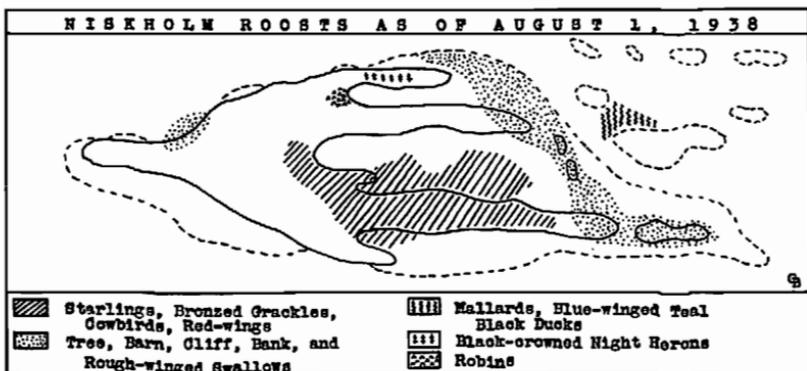
ture excess of 70° by the end of the month, with the average temperature at 61.6°. June's average temperature of 68.8° was nearly a degree above normal, with most of the excess accumulated early. Precipitation, 2.45 inches, was nearly normal, but most was received on the 23rd and after. The July temperature, 73.1°, was slightly below the average of past seven years, and drought conditions continued. Of the month's total precipitation of 1.91 inches, 0.67 inch was received July 27 - 28 and 0.69 inch July 31. Through May, June, and July there was a precipitation deficiency of 4.5 inches.

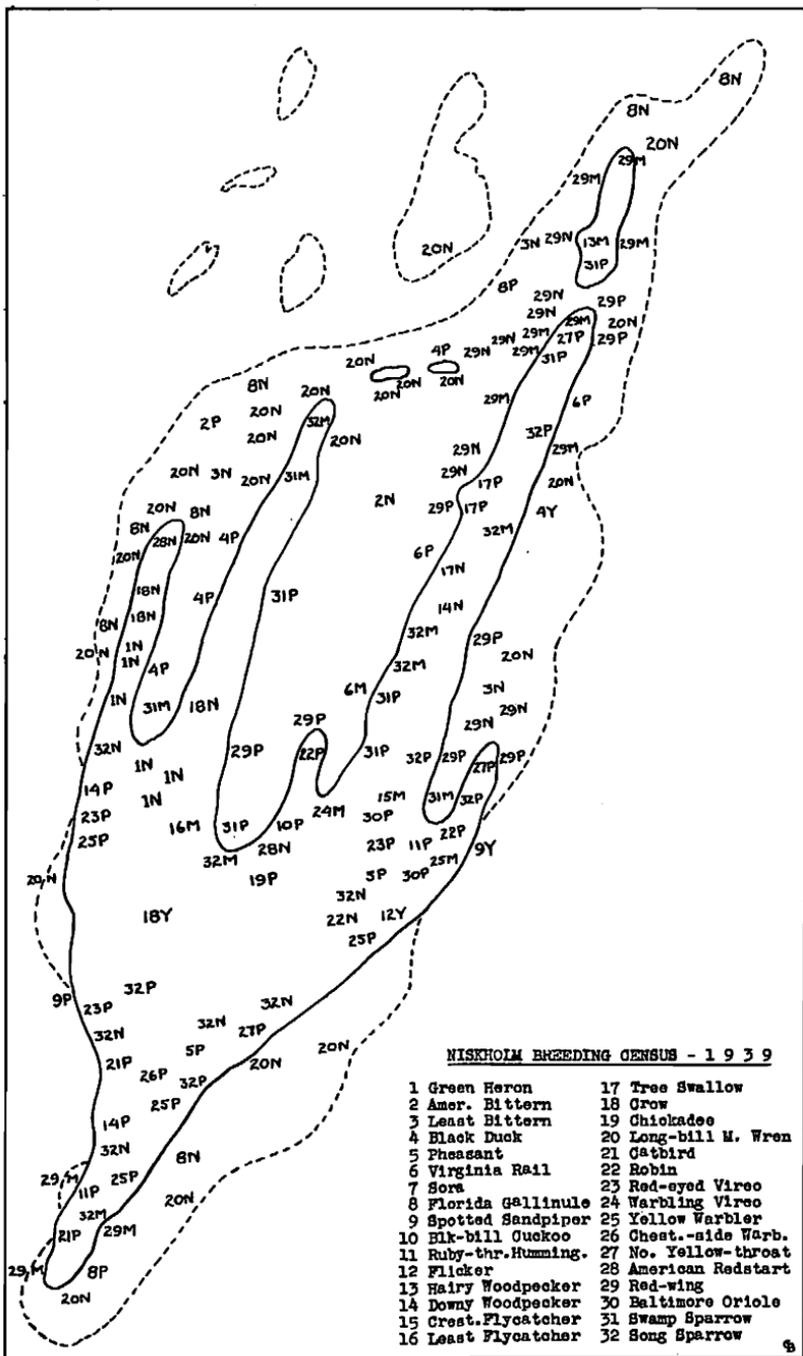
**Observers:** 1938 - George H. Bainbridge, Elmer S. Bartlett (Rome, N.Y.). Guy Bartlett, Barrington S. Havens, Chester M. Moore, and Benton R. Seguin, reporting as individuals. 1939 - Guy Bartlett, B. S. Havens, C. N. Moore, B. R. Seguin, Rudolph H. Stone, and Robert W. Underwood, all of the Schoenectady Bird Club.

**Census, 1938 and 1939:** In the following tabulation it has been necessary, because of space requirements, to key much of the information. The symbols are: N - Actual nests, with eggs or young; P - Pairs of birds regularly seen and including those carrying nesting material; M - Singing male, regularly in fixed territory; A - Adults with fledglings out of nests.

**Birds Nesting, and Regularly Feeding, Within the Area**

Pied-billed Grebe: '38, 1Y  
E. Green Heron: '38, 4W; '39, 6W  
American Bittern: '38, 1N, 3P; '39, 1N, 1P  
E. Least Bittern: '38, 2N, 2W; '39, 3N  
Common Black Duck: '38, 1Y, 2P; '39, 1Y, 4P  
King Rail: '38, 2N  
Virginia Rail: '38, 1Y, 1N, 2P; '39, 1Y, 2P  
Sora: '38, 1Y, 2W; '39, 1W  
Florida Gallinule: '38, 1N, 6M; '39, 7N, 2P  
American Woodcock: '38, 1P  
Black-billed Cuckoo: '38, 1P, 1M; '39, 1P  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird: '38, 1P; '39, 2P  
E. Hairy Woodpecker: '38, 1Y; '39, 1W  
N. Downy Woodpecker: '38, 2N; '39, 1N, 2P





N. Grested Flycatcher: '38, 1P; '39, 1M  
 Least Flycatcher: '38, 1P, 1M; '39, 1M  
 Tree Swallow: '38, 4N, 5P; '39, 1N, 2P  
 Black-capped Chickadee: '38, 1N, 2P; '39, 1P  
 Long-billed Marsh Wren: '38, 57N, 21M;  
 '39, 24N ( "Cook" nests, in ratio of  
 about 5:1, not counted)

Veery: '38, 1M  
 Red-eyed Vireo: '38, 1M; '39, 3P  
 E. Warbling Vireo: '38, 1P, 1M; '39, 1M  
 E. Yellow Warbler: '38, 1N, 2P, 6M; '39, 4P, 1M  
 Chestnut-sided Warbler: '39, 1P  
 Northern Yellowthroat: '38, 2P, 2M; '39, 3P  
 American Redstart: '38, 1N, 2M; '39, 2N  
 E. Red-wing: '38, 12N, 6P, 14M; '39, 9N, 8P, 11M  
 Swamp Sparrow: '38, 1Y, 9P, 5M; '39, 3Y, 6P  
 E. Song Sparrow: '38, 2N, 14P, 16M; '39,  
 6N, 4P, 7M

Totals  
 1938 - 28 species, 243 pairs

1939 - 25 species, 156 pairs

Densities

1938 - 530 pairs per 100 acres

1939 - 296 pairs per 100 acres

Birds Nesting Within Area, But Feeding  
 to Varying Degree Outside

Ring-necked Pheasant: '38, 1N, 1M; '39, 2P  
 Spotted Sandpiper: '38, 1Y; '39, 1Y, 1P  
 Yellow-billed Cuckoo: '38, 1M  
 N. Flicker: '38, 1N; '39, 1Y  
 Alder Flycatcher: '38, 1P  
 E. Crow: '38, 2N, 1Y; '39, 3N, 1Y  
 Catbird: '38, 1P, 1M; '39, 2P  
 E. Robin: '38, 4M; '39, 1N, 2P  
 Baltimore Oriole: '38, 1Y, 3M; '39, 2P  
 Cowbird: '38, 5Y (with Warbling Vireo 1,  
 Yellow Warbler 2, Song Sparrow 2)

Totals

1938 - 10 species, 24 pairs, in-  
 creasing density to 560 pair per  
 100 acres

1939 - 7 species, 16 pairs, in-  
 creasing density to 330 pairs per  
 100 acres

Regular Visitors

E. Green Heron: '38, 10; '39, 8  
 Black-crowned Night Heron: '38, 10; '39, 6  
 Common Black Duck: '38, 9; '39, 4  
 Marsh Hawk: '38, 2; '39, 1  
 E. Sparrow Hawk: '38, 2; '39, 1  
 Killdeer: '38, 6; '39, 2  
 E. Mourning Dove: '38, 2  
 Barn Owl: '38, 2  
 N. Barred Owl: '38, 1  
 Chimney Swift: '38, 20; '39, 8  
 E. Belted Kingfisher: '38, 2; '39, 4  
 Bank Swallow: '38, 4; '39, 6  
 Barn Swallow: '38, 20; '39, 8  
 N. Blue Jay: '38, 6; '39, 2  
 E. Crow: '38, 12; '39, 6  
 Cedar Waxwing: '38, 12; '39, 4  
 Starling: '39, 30  
 Bronzed Grackle: '38, 8; '39, 6  
 E. Goldfinch: '38, 14; '39, 8

Totals:

1938 - 15 added species

1939 - 13 added species

Final Densities

1938 - 1470 adults per 100 acres

1939 - 889 adults per 100 acres

Birds Not Breeding; and Visitors

1938 - Great Blue Heron, June 5  
 (plus late summer dates); Lesser Scaup

Duck, 7 through June 4 (beyond previous  
 and-dates); N. Red-shouldered Hawk, 1;  
 Wood Pewee, 1. Also, through breeding  
 season, two roosts regularly occupied  
 from dusk to dawn, one with 32 non-  
 breeding Black-crowned Night Herons; the  
 other with approximately 5,000 Star-  
 lings, 200 Bronzed Grackles, and 200 E.  
 Red-wings. After July 1 the roosts in-  
 creased, and by August 13 included ap-  
 proximately: (1) Black-crowned Night  
 Heron, unchanged; (2) Common Mallard, 4,  
 Common Black Duck, 120, Blue-winged  
 Teal, 7; (3) E. Robin, 80; (4) Tree  
 Swallow, 600, Bank Swallow, 1,200,  
 Rough-winged Swallow, 100, Barn Swallow,  
 1,000, Cliff Swallow, 50 (plus added  
 swallow roosts on nearby smaller is-  
 lands); (5) Starling, 4,000, Bronzed  
 Grackle, 350, E. Cowbird, 200, E. Red-  
 wing, 600. Added species recorded be-  
 tween July 1 and August 13, exclusive of  
 short-duration migrants, included: Ameri-  
 can Egret, maximum of four regularly  
 seen, arrived July 4; Wilson's Snipe, 1;  
 Herring Gull, 1; Semipalmated Sandpiper,  
 8; and increases in other species.

1939 - Few occasional visitors as  
 well as transients, including Great Blue  
 Heron, American Egret, and Common Mal-  
 lard in July. As was the case during  
 1938 there were two roosts regularly oc-  
 cupied from dusk to dawn, one with 22  
 non-breeding Black-crowned Night Herons;  
 the other with approximately 3,000 Star-  
 lings, 500 Red-wings, and 500 Bronzed  
 Grackles. As the season progressed the  
 second roost increased decidedly, particu-  
 larly with regard to Starlings. A  
 much larger area of the island was oc-  
 cupied by the roost, with the cattails  
 matted down over wide expanses. The  
 Swallow roost in late July was much  
 smaller than in 1938, apparently because  
 the Starlings, etc., had possession of  
 the area. However, an increase in Swal-  
 lows was noticed at a nearby, unconsused  
 island.

It is felt that the decided de-  
 crease in density of 1939 compared with  
 1938 was the result of (1) the retarded  
 spring, (2) the drought which produced a  
 less dense cattail and marsh growth, and  
 (3) of probably more importance, because  
 the roosting Starlings, Grackles, and  
 Red-wings ruined additional territory so  
 far as breeding birds were concerned.

Niskholm is one locality that is  
 being consused. In the next issue of  
 FEATHERS will be published a preliminary  
 description of the birds of Consaulus  
 Vly, a spruce swamp close to Schenectady  
 which it is planned to visit regularly.

The Schenectady Bird Club suggests  
 that still other sections be consused.  
 Central Park, Westina Sanctuary, etc.,  
 are good possibilities; and so are yards  
 or blocks in the city and suburbs. In-  
 dividual farms also are ideal.

BIRD-LORE in its issues of March-  
 April, 1937 and 1938, has outlined cer-  
 tain rules it is advisable to follow in  
 making a breeding-bird census, and it is  
 suggested that these articles be read by  
 those planning such records.

# FEATHERS

Published by the Schenectady Bird Club

FEATHERS is published monthly by and for the Schenectady Bird Club, and goes to members. Contributions and suggestions for improvements are desired. Annual Membership—Active, \$2; Associate, \$1; Junior, 50 c.

Barrington S. Havens, Editor, 63 No. Brandywine Avenue.

## OUR NEXT MEETING

THOSE OF US youngsters who have not yet had the edge of our enthusiasm for bird chasing dulled have probably often wished we had nothing else to do but spend our days in bird study. We may look forward to the day when retirement allows us to follow our hobby -- whether or not it be ornithology -- freely.

J. M. Hollister, the speaker at the next meeting of the Schenectady Bird Club, is taking plenty of time to ride his hobby. It wasn't very long ago when he retired from active work at the General Electric Co., and a great deal of his time since then has been spent taking color pictures of birds and their nests. He it was who, spending the winter in Florida and hunting vainly for the mockingbird in order to take its picture, read an account of the bird's being found back home almost on his own doorstep.

Mr. Hollister's collection of colored bird slides is quite large, and his talk about them we are sure will be very interesting to all members. Accordingly we are looking forward to a large attendance at our next meeting. Remember:

The date: September 25.  
The time: 7:45 o'clock.  
The place: Schenectady Museum.

## MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

ANYONE, it seems, can make a mistake in identifying a bird, but there are times when ordinary error is transcended and the misidentification involves imaginative flights which, to a bird student at least, seem nothing short of sheer genius.

Just recently, for example, representatives of the Schenectady municipal government telephoned a local conserva-

tionist saying that a pheasant had wandered into the city hall premises. What, the inquirer wanted to know, should be done with the bird?

It was suggested that the bird be taken to the Bemis Hill Reservoir and there liberated. This was accordingly done. That's really all there is to the story, except that the bird was not a pheasant at all but a screech owl.

The occasion prompts us to recall similar cases in the past. A few years ago the Schenectady Works News, employee newspaper of the General Electric plant at Schenectady, published an illustrated item about a duck which had flown in the window of one of the G-E buildings. All would have been well, had not the picture which went with the story clearly shown that the bird was an American bittern.

Similarly touched with the alchemy of an imaginative and credulous viewpoint, the evening grosbeak has, in the past, become the Audubon oriole; various members of the order Falconiformes have become chicken hawks; starlings have become rails; black ducks have been transformed into cormorants; pheasants have turned into short-eared owls; grebes have become ducks and vice versa; barn owls have become snowy owls; flickers, downy, and hairy woodpeckers have metamorphosed into red-headed woodpeckers; prairie horned larks have blossomed out as lark sparrows; indigo buntings turn into blue grosbeaks; the purple finch is reported as a pine grosbeak; the great blue heron parades as a pelican; various shrieks have left their humble station in favor of the more exalted status of a mockingbird; and last but not least are the ordinary sphinx moths which are not uncommonly mistaken for hummingbirds.

MAYBE it was true in previous years but it wasn't until this year that such reports became common. Now it appears as though the woodcock is becoming a bird of the city yard. Last month (FEATHERS, p.18) C. N. Moore told of a woodcock found in the yard of C. H. Drens, Bedford Road. A few days later G. B. Aves, in the Schenectady Gazette, told of a woodcock nest in the yard of W. L. Merrill, Sunnyside Road, Scotia. And since then there have been two more reports of woodcock records in the city. One was seen on several occasions in late August in the yard of Mrs. J. W. Gosling, Waverly Place; and for at least a few days in succession in early September one was seen in the yard of A. B. Allen, Ardsley Road. --C.S.K.

SPECIES	GENERAL	SIZE	WING	BREAST	TAIL	EYE	HEAD	NECK	SONG & CALL NOTES
Savannah	Like small song spar.	Smaller	Bars	Streaked	Short, slightly forked	Yellow eye stripe		Pale Pink legs	Three weak 'sit' notes and two insect buzzes
Grasshopper		Smaller	Plain	Plain	Short		"Flat"		Bubbling or straight insect buzz
Henlow's		Smaller	Reddish, no bars	Fine streaks	Short, spars		Olive-golden		"Flee-sick", weak but far-reaching
Vesper	Like gray song spar.	Same	Chaquid, slender, slight bar	Streaked	White feathers		Large		Resembling song sparrow but more musical, usually produced on the high range, double notes, second ones high
Tree		Same	Bars	Large spot, no streaks	Forked		Rufous cap		High-pitched and musical whistles, fall and spring. Note - tseet, tseelit
Chipping		Much smaller	Plain	Plain	Forked	White line above, black thru	Rufous cap		Simple trill or rapid notes on one tone. Note - a short chip
Field	Reddish upper	Smaller	Bars	Plain	Forked	Light eye ring	Rufous cap		Series of (usually) descending notes, ending in trill. Note - tseet, tsap
White-crowned	More gray than thr.	Larger	Bars	Plain	Forked	No yellow in eye line	Puffed, purplish-brown		Starts somewhat like that of white-throat but ends nasally. Note - chink
White-throated	More brown than thr.	Larger	Bars	Plain	Forked	Yellow in eye line	Striped		"Old Sam Peabody Peabody Peabody" whistle. Note - chink, tseet
Fox	Reddish brown	Much larger	Plain	Heavy streaks	Reddish				Loud, melodious, variable, without trills. Note - tsee-est
Lincoln's	Short-tail song spar.	Smaller	Plain	Buff band, blue line, streaks	Rounded	Narrow eye ring			Resembling house wren or purple Finch. Note - tsack, tsack
Swamp	Stout & dark	Slightly smaller	Plain	Plain	Rounded		Rufous cap		Trill of single pitch louder, more musical than "Old Sam Peabody" CHIPPING SPARROW. Note - chink
SONG		x	Plain	Large spot, heavy streaks	Straight				Very variable; usually starts with three repeated notes. Note - tsack, tseet, faint ast (winter)
Rose-breast-groebek (female)		Much larger	Broad bars	Heavy streaks		Conspic. white line over eye		Heavy bill	
Indigo Buntings (female)	Plain brown	Smaller	Plain	Plain	Plain	Plain	Plain		
Purple Finch (female)		Same	Bars	Heavy streaks		Broad buff eye		Heavy bill	

A QUICK LOOK AT

"INCONSPICUOUS" SPARROWS

# FEATHERS

Published by the Schenectady Bird Club

OCTOBER, 1939

VOL. 1, NO. 5

## ◆ THE BIRDS OF CONSALUS VLAIE ◆

### A PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE SUMMER BIRDS OF A LARCH-HEMLOCK-RED SPRUCE-POISON SUMAC SWAMP WITHIN A DOZEN MILES OF SCHENECTADY

By Nelle VanVorst and George H. Bainbridge...Map by Eslly Hallenbeck

ENCOURAGED by the results of a preliminary study of the spruce swamp near South Berne (FEATHERS, pp. 9 & 10) and knowing that the Consalus Vlaie\* is similar in origin and flora to the Berne swamp, six trips have been made this year by several members of the Schenectady Bird Club to investigate the bird population of this territory.

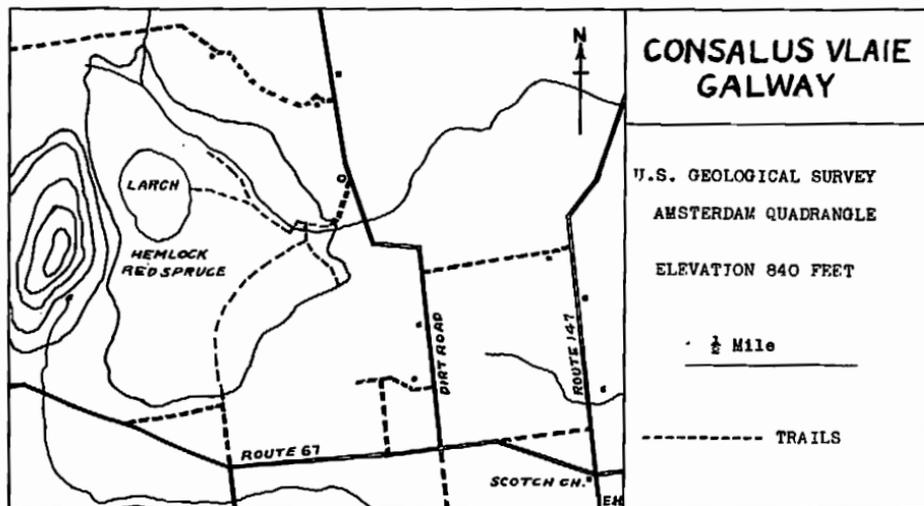
Consalus Vlaie is in the s.w. corner of Saratoga County, with an area of about 250 acres at a general elevation of about 840 ft. above sea level. Since

this is so much less than the elevation of the Berne swamp, it seemed unlikely that the records of summering bird life would be very similar even though the origin and flora of both are practically the same.

This vlaie is a vegetation-filled postglacial lake fed by several springs, the most notable of which is the Governor's Spring. Many such swampy or muskeg areas occur in the postglacial lake regions of Ontario, but the filling-in process is not so far advanced.

Because of the lush growth of trees and bushes in most of the area so far traveled by club members, a compass is advisable. The wooded area is made up for the most part of larch, red spruce, poison sumash, and hemlock. Several

\* Consalus is a euphonic hybrid from the name of J. Gonzales, descendant of a Spanish Huguenot, who lived in the vicinity in 1770. Vlaie is Dutch for swamp.



specimens of the poison sumach measured 6" in diameter, an unusual girth for this tree.

Of the flowers clintonia was perhaps the most abundant in early spring on the higher portions of this area. In the spruce area sphagnum moss was found in abundance. The most cherished of wild flowers, the lady's slipper, both pink and yellow, grows in several locations in this area.

In the open, marshy section during midsummer several varieties of orchids, such as grass pink, snake mouth, and giant ladies' tresses are found in great profusion. Some curious and interesting plants, such as the pitcher plant and round-leaf sundew, are present in great numbers, and later in the season these give way to the brilliant spikes of the cardinal flower.

In many sections the growth of shrubs, ferns, and trees is so dense as to make entrance practically impossible. No unusual specimens of ferns were found in the area. The honeysuckle bush, mountain cranberry, and high-bush blueberry were present in great numbers, and their berries furnish an abundant source of food for the birds. Mountain holly with its striking red berries is also present to some extent in one section. In addition to other boreal flowers and shrubs already mentioned a quantity of Labrador tea was found.

The six trips (May 28 and 30, June 3, July 1 and 9, and September 10) combined to yield a total of 64 species of birds as follows:

Red-shouldered hawk, broad-winged hawk, marsh hawk, ruffed grouse, Wilson's snipe, mourning dove, black-billed cuckoo, chimney swift, flicker, pileated woodpecker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, downy woodpecker, kingbird, crested flycatcher, phoebe, alder flycatcher, wood pewee, olive-sided flycatcher, bank swallow, barn swallow, blue jay, crow, black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, catbird, robin, wood thrush, hermit thrush, veery, bluebird, cedar waxwing, starling, red-eyed vireo, black and white warbler, worm-eating warbler, golden-winged warbler, blue-winged warbler, Nashville warbler, magnolia warbler, black-throated green warbler, black-throated blue warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, oven-bird, Canada warbler, northern yellowthroat, redstart, bobolink, meadowlark, red-wing, cowbird, scarlet tanager, indigo bunting, purple finch, goldfinch, towhee, savannah sparrow, Henslow's sparrow, vesper sparrow, chipping sparrow, field



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Barrington S. Havens, Editor, 63 No. Brandywine Avenue.

sparrow, white-throated sparrow, swamp sparrow, and song sparrow.

Of these, two species, Wilson snipe and blue-winged warbler, are open to question. On the first trip a bird was flushed from a nest on the ground containing four eggs, brownish-colored and with chocolate-brown spots. From the character of the nest, eggs, and terrain this bird, although not positively identified, seems to be the snipe.

The blue-winged warbler was viewed under such poor light conditions in very dense growth that its identity is problematical.

Of the 78 species of birds found in the Berne swamp 53 were present in the Consalus Vlaie. The 25 species not on the Vlaie list are: sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk, red-tailed hawk, sparrow hawk, killdeer, woodcock, screech owl, saw-whet owl, hummingbird, hairy woodpecker, least flycatcher, red-breasted nuthatch, house wren, brown thrasher, warbling vireo, myrtle warbler, Blackburnian warbler, both water thrushes, English sparrow, Baltimore oriole, bronzed grackle, rose-breasted grosbeak, grasshopper sparrow, and junco.

Ten species found in the Vlaie but not in the Berne swamp are: broad-winged hawk, snipe, sapsucker, olive-sided flycatcher, bank swallow, brown creeper, wood thrush, worm-eating warbler, golden winged warbler, blue-winged warbler, and swamp sparrow.

The following species, found on midsummer trips, undoubtedly are summer residents and probably bred in the Vlaie itself: broad-winged hawk, marsh hawk, mourning dove, black-billed cuckoo, blue jay, chimney swift, downy woodpecker, crested flycatcher, phoebe, alder flycatcher, wood pewee, barn swallow, crow, black-capped chickadee, brown creeper, catbird, robin, wood thrush, veery, hermit thrush, bluebird, cedar waxwing, red-eyed vireo, black and white warbler, blue-winged warbler, Nashville warbler,

## PHOTOGRAPHING FLORIDA'S BIRDS

By J. M. Hollister

magnolia warbler, black-throated blue warbler, black-throated green warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, oven-bird, Canada warbler, northern yellow-throat, cowbird, indigo bunting, purple finch, savannah sparrow, field sparrow, white-throated sparrow, swamp sparrow, and song sparrow.

In addition to these, the following are probably resident breeders, although not recorded in midsummer: snipe, pileated woodpecker, ruffed grouse, white-breasted nuthatch, starling, goldfinch, and chipping sparrow.

On two trips a female marsh hawk followed the party, flying overhead during most of the trip and continually crying. Attempts to find the nest in the vicinity brought the female swooping low to the ground, several times within several feet of the heads of the party. The male, noticeably smaller in size, put in an occasional appearance to see what it was all about. His cries were lower in pitch and volume and were given less often than those of the female. On one flight the male dropped a dead sparrow, but it did not land near the nest. The nest was not found, although the area was thoroughly searched.

## OUR NEXT MEETING

IF YOU ARE thinking of erecting a feeding station this winter, by all means attend our next meeting. At that time Chester N. Moore will be our speaker, and he will tell how to erect feeding stations, what food to use, and what to expect by way of bird visitors. His talk will be illustrated by pictures of construction.

Instead of following the usual practice of holding our meeting on the last Monday of each month, our October meeting will be held Monday night, October 23, at 7:45 o'clock. This change was made in order to avoid the annual juvenile display of Hallow'en exuberance which inevitably would be embarrassing to our members if the meeting were held on the 30th.

The place of meeting also has been changed. Because the Schenectady Museum is unavailable on the 23d, our meeting will be held in Room 109, Nott Terrace High School.

(Editor's Note: This article was written by Mr. Hollister, speaker at our November meeting, to supplement his talk.)

IT IS NOT necessary to be an expert ornithologist in order to photograph birds, by the time you have a satisfactory picture you not only know the name of the bird but have a fairly good idea of its habits.

My experience in Florida during the winter of 1938-39 was with resident species outside the nesting season, so I adopted the plan of training the birds to come to me rather than to chase them myself. The first problem was to provide water and food in a spot where the light was favorable for Kodachrome film, as all my pictures are in color -- and incidentally in a comfortable place to loaf. I kept out of sight when working the camera.

The water problem was solved by taking an automobile rim, covering one side with wood to form the bottom, and then filling with cement and sweeping out the inside with a form to allow the proper depth for water. The rim was then placed on top of a mound of sand about a foot high and shored with coquina rock to give a homelike appearance.

Several methods of feeding were tried, as the table manners of the various birds were quite different. I tied bread to tree branches, placed it on the ground, staked down, scattered feed around the drinking pool, and erected a separate feeding station about four feet high. All methods were satisfactory to some birds, while others had a decided preference.

I spent considerable time watching the birds before trying a picture, and soon had quite a family of mockers, jay, cardinal, towhee, brown thrasher, quail, ground dove, grackle, and catbird.

Unexpected difficulties developed. The first pictures of the male cardinal showed no crest. I discovered that soon after lighting, if the surroundings were quiet, down went the crest before the bird either fed or took a drink. The mockinbird was curious and, immediately after driving another bird from the feed, would go himself before I could push the button. The towhee, although the most numerous, was the hardest species to photograph. The male seemed more

nervous than the female, but each would run in and grab a morsel of food and as quickly fly to cover to eat it.

My camera was a Leica fitted with a 20-foot wire release. At first I used a 50-mm. lens, which allowed a set-up of 3 1/2 feet from the object. Later I used a 135-mm. telephoto lens, which allowed a five-foot set-up. I seemed to catch the color better with the latter lens, although the field was much more restricted. My greatest loss of time was due to the sun rather than the subjects. Many a time the bird was in a good position, when a cloud would spoil the light. A G-E exposure meter was used, which undoubtedly prevented many failures. Over 95 per cent of my shots were satisfactory to me.

My experience with water birds was very limited -- chiefly ducks and gulls on the Indian River. This again was a problem of feeding. I would throw a slice of bread far into the water, and this would attract one or two birds. Their actions would soon attract others, and I could bring them within range of the camera by gradually shortening the throw of bread. With one loaf I might get two or three shots. Like the plumb-er, I needed a helper.

Finch, and White-throated Sparrow. Some of the species mentioned above have been found in previous years in other sections; others are locally new.

There were several other items of interest during the summer, including the breeding-bird census of Niskholm (p.15). The American Egret arrived at the Crescent Lake section of the Mohawk River on June 17 (C.N.Moore, p.5), and was there regularly in varying numbers after July 4. Black Ducks were more common as breeders, as were Wood Ducks; and Blue-winged Teal, as in 1938, seemed also to have been summer residents, if not breeders. The Woodcock as a breeding bird of the city (p.19) was unusual. Records of the Pileated Woodpecker, with young at Berne (p.9) and in late summer at the Consalus (p.21) added to the known range of this uncommon species. There was one record of the Orchard Oriole, a first-year male recorded at Collins Lake (Jos.Janicic) on June 11. Baltimore Orioles seemed to be unusually common through the summer. The finding of a Prairie Horned Lark nest with three eggs on July 10 (Benton Seguin) indicated a second nesting of this bird which regularly nests early. The Prairie Warbler again was found as a summer resident at Karner (p.7).

The weather report for 1939's summer, incidentally, showed an emphatic deficiency in rainfall. May was the driest in 20 years, with rainfall two inches below normal; June rainfall was nearly normal; July was the driest in six years; and August deficiency was more than two inches. Both May and August were well above normal in temperature, and June and July slightly above normal. -- G.B.

**THE SEASON - Summer, 1939**

SUMMER OF 1939 had many worthwhile additions to the records of the birds of Schenectady, chiefly because of concentration of observations in types of territory unfortunately missing or at a minimum in previous recent summers.

Numerous species previously considered as rare or questionable summer residents locally were found without question. A spruce swamp at Berne (p.9) this year contributed summer records of the Red-tailed Hawk, Hermit Thrush, Red-breasted Nuthatch, the Nashville, Myrtle, Magnolia, and Blackburnian Warblers, Purple Finch, Slate-colored Junco, and White-throated Sparrow. A somewhat similar swamp, the Consalus Vlaie (p.21) indicated as summer birds the Broad-winged Hawk, Wilson's Snipe (?), Olive-sided Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, the Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Nashville, and Magnolia Warblers, Purple

BABY SPARROWS, robins, and orioles are often picked up by well-meaning people. Seldom, however, are swallows or starlings so found. Birds vary in ability to fly upon leaving the nest; the starling is one of the birds well able to care for itself immediately on its first attempt at flight.

"COMMENTS on the Season," page 8, included reference to a yellow-throated warbler as recorded locally May 20. The record should be omitted from the list.

# FEATHERS

Published by the Schenectady Bird Club

NOVEMBER, 1939

VOL. 1, NO. 6

## ALEXANDER SPRUNT JR. WILL DESCRIBE SPECTACULAR SOUTHERN BIRDS

Noted Lecturer, Author, and Supervisor of Audubon Sanctuaries in the South Will Tell of the Association's Work in Saving Threatened Species - Meeting Will Be Held in Nott Terrace High School Auditorium on November 14

ALEXANDER SPRUNT, JR., field representative of the National Association of Audubon Societies, will be the speaker at the November meeting of the Schenectady Bird Club, in the auditorium of the Nott Terrace High School Tuesday, November 14, at 8:15 o'clock. The school auditorium was selected since the meeting will be open to the public and it is expected that a capacity audience will be present.

Mr. Sprunt, having supervision of the work of the Audubon wardens in the great sanctuary areas from the Carolinas south to Florida and Texas, will tell of the remarkable accomplishments of the sanctuaries in the saving of numerous species of birds which seemed destined to join the role of the extinct, and will accompany his talk with slides and motion pictures.

The southern sanctuary areas are patrolled by Audubon wardens during the critical breeding and nesting periods, and huge colonies of birds receive protection in this way -- among them the most beautiful and spectacular species in America, such as herons and egrets, spoonbills, ibises, etc. There can be no doubt that some of these species have been saved from utter destruction only through the protective measures taken by the Audubon Society, and directly supervised by Mr. Sprunt during several years past.

From his earliest youth Mr. Sprunt, a native of Charleston, S. C., has been, as he himself puts it, a "proowler of swamps," and finds himself thoroughly at home in an Audubon sanctuary.

Mr. Sprunt also renders valuable service to the Audubon cause as an educational representative, a work for which he is admirably equipped by reason of his rich experience as a field ornithologist, his intimate knowledge of the problems of wild life conservation and his work as a lecturer and writer. He has contributed to many leading magazines. A collection of his stories has been published under the title "Dwellers in the Silences," and more recently he furnished the text for a booklet, "Beautiful Audubon Sanctuaries," published by the N.A.A.S.

Mr. Sprunt has served on many committees concerned with wildlife conservation; has been Curator of Ornithology of the Charleston (S.C.) Museum; and is a member of the American Ornithologists' Union.

Members of the Schenectady Bird Club are entitled to free admission to the meeting, and tickets have already been distributed. For others, it has been announced by Alice Holmes, chairman of the program committee, tickets are on sale at 25 cents each, and are obtainable through members of the Club, as outlined in the notice already sent to members with their tickets.

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Many of the birds to which Mr. Sprunt will refer in his talk are unknown to Schenectadians, except to those few who know the South and who have gone into the swamps there. There is one bird that is particularly an exception, and that is the American egret.



FEATHERS is published monthly by and for the Schenectady Bird Club, and goes to members. Contributions and suggestions for improvements are desired. Annual Membership—Active, \$2; Associate, \$1; Junior, 50 c.

Barrington S. Havens, Editor, 63 No. Brandywine Avenue.

## BIRD HAVEN DELUXE

By Edna Becker

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL station on Cape Cod is sanctuary, waterfowl refuge, and banding station all in one. Along the highway between Chatham and Provincetown, in S. Wellfleet, is a sign "L.O. AUSTIN, ORNITHOLOGICAL RESEARCHER." Visitors are apparently not unusual, since the road is well-marked and a parking place is provided.

I was informed that the overseer, who did the bird work, was somewhere on the grounds and that I would have to find him in order to learn about the bird work. That sounded simple enough, until I discovered how large the grounds were and saw the many roads leading in various directions.

I started out on foot and was immediately awed by a lovely pine grove, which harbored many birds. These were very evident, even though it was mid-afternoon -- a lull period for birds generally. I next retraced my steps and followed another road. Still no sign of anyone.

Then I took the car and drove toward the main road, remembering that there were several roads leading off from it. Before I had reached the cross roads, however, a car came in sight on one of them, and I stopped to hail it, hoping it would be the overseer. It was -- and a more cordial person I could not have encountered anywhere.

He was on his way to the water traps and invited me to follow. Nothing exciting was there at the time -- just black ducks -- but it was interesting, anyway, to see the arrangement of traps, the pump (an old Model T engine) which regulated the amount of water at the traps, and the grain supply in the work shed. (I've forgotten the yearly amount of corn used at the sanctuary, but it is

many tons.) The daily routine of setting and examining traps was nearly finished by then, so I left after making arrangements to be there by 8 o'clock on the following morning, when Mr. Brewer, the overseer, was planning to start to work.

The weather next day was favorable, and that entire morning was a wonderful experience. First we closed the doors of the 11 house traps. Next step was to set up several Italian bird nets. These are made of black linen thread and are about eight feet high and 20 to 30 feet long. They are put up on ropes in rows in brushy areas. The slack in the nets is sufficient so that birds coming from either direction and at any point on the net will be caught. We put up four of these.

The first visit to the water traps showed nothing in them, but the sight of 20 or so Canada geese coming out of the swampy region on the far side and proceeding single file across the water right in front of us was most picturesque.

The round of visits to the house traps was most interesting, particularly since Mr. Brewer let me catch and band many of the birds. He used a landing net for catching them. The majority were repeats, having been banded before, but we handled each one, checking and recording band numbers and banding the newcomers. These included song sparrows, field sparrows, chipping sparrows, a single savannah sparrow, and mourning doves. It was the first time I had handled any of these, and, needless to say, it was quite a thrill.

A greater yellowlegs was seen near the water traps, but no shore birds were trapped that morning. However, our final visit to the water traps was a high spot in the whole routine -- five blue-winged teal were in one of the traps. This discovery was unusual enough to bring a shout of joy from Mr. Brewer. After putting the birds into two gathering cages, he brought them to the grain shed, where he kept the bands of the larger sizes, and proceeded to band. He allowed me to band one of the ducks, too, with his help, since I hardly dared trust myself.

The birds caught in the Italian bird nets included a towhee, wood pewee, female yellowthroat, and catbird.

The estate has, besides the house and water traps, over 400 bird boxes, all set on poles of uniform height.

These are equipped with nest-box traps, so that nesting birds can be banded.

The office work connected with the banding records is sufficient to keep a secretary busy, and one is employed for that purpose. In the office with the files is a collection of mounted birds.

Dr. Austin, the New York owner of the estate, is, I was told, seldom there to enjoy it, but he is an enthusiastic and thorough ornithologist, as his elaborate and very efficiently carried out banding station would indicate.

## HOW IT LOOKS



Since the publication, in our last issue, of "The Birds of Conesus Vale," by Nelle Van Vorst and George H. Bainbridge, a number of readers have asked for more information on poison sumac, mentioned as being particularly luxuriant in the swamp. Accordingly we asked our "staff artist" to draw up a sketch of the leaf, fruit cluster, and winter twig, and this is accordingly reproduced herewith.

To some there might be some confusion of this plant with ash, but those who know their trees assure us that the two are readily distinguished upon a careful examination.

## REFUGEES

By George H. Bainbridge

ON SATURDAY, October 14, three members of the Schenectady Bird Club on a trip in the Adirondacks ascended Cascade Mountain (elevation about 4100 feet above sea level) in gusty winds of gale force, snow flurries, and temperatures well below freezing. This mountain lies just southeast of the Cascade Lakes, which are along the south side of Route 86A about five miles west of Keene, N.Y. For some distance from the top the mountain was well carpeted with snow from four to six inches deep.

In the descent and about 200 to 300 feet down, the then leading member of the group beckoned to the others to come quietly. Much to the surprise of all, there were three ring-necked cock pheasants moving around more or less leisurely on the snow-clad ground amidst the scrub spruce and balsam growth.

Although each of the crowd has climbed several Adirondack peaks and one has climbed about 40 different peaks in the Adirondacks, Catskills, and White Mountains, none had ever before seen pheasants at any such altitude -- about 3900 feet -- where the "pickings" seemed lean indeed for such birds. At first blush it seemed that these pheasants were just "goofy" to come to such inhospitable surroundings.

Reflecting, however, that on Monday following the trip in question the open season for pheasants would begin, maybe they weren't so foolish after all. The probability is that shooting in the valley at birds such as woodcock had driven these pheasants to a place where the ordinary bird hunter would never think of looking for them.

## 'TAINT THE WAY I HEARD IT

"MISTAKEN IDENTITIES," (p. 19) told of a black duck having been mistaken for a cormorant. Maybe so, in which case there's another story to be told, in reverse.

A few years ago there were, as occasionally has been true, a few of the double-crested cormorants on the wide waters at Niskayuna in early autumn.

The birds tarried there too long, with the result that the opening of the hunting season found them still there. And, as is so well known, nothing -- gulls, grebes, herons, sandpipers, or anything with wings -- is safe then, even before sunrise.

The result was that at least one cormorant sat still too long, let a sportsman get too close, and succumbed to lead poisoning. The bird was, the story goes, duly dressed as a black duck but, being a fish-eater, went uneaten.

## BIRD vs. HUMAN HEARING

THERE SEEMS to be pretty good scientific evidence that at least certain birds are not able to hear human voices, since their ears are pitched to respond only to sounds of higher frequencies or pitch. That probably explains to some extent what so many bird observers take for granted -- that it is more important to remain motionless than it is to be silent while watching a wary bird. More than one person can vouch for the fact that a bird has not been disturbed by conversation but has flown quickly when the watcher moved.

Tests conducted by A. R. Brand and F.P. Kellogg of Cornell and mentioned in a recent issue of SCIENCE show that domestic pigeons, starlings, English sparrows, and canaries are certainly limited in their hearing range. The first three species hear about five octaves, the canary hears about three, and human beings normally hear about ten octaves.

The canary, for example, was found to have a hearing range whose lowest note is above 1000 cycles per second, and the great percentage of human speech is below that pitch, although the human voice does go higher, especially in the case of sibilants, and telephone circuits, if they are good ones, cover a frequency range including the canary's hearing range.

Just as it is true that some birds don't hear people, so it is true that some people don't hear birds -- or at least they don't hear some bird notes. It doesn't necessarily follow that the people are deaf or even hard of hearing in the usual sense of the expression.

What it does mean is that the hearing range of people varies with the in-

dividual. Some people can hear very high notes; others can't. A very large percentage of birds sing at frequencies at or above 4000 cycles (the top of the piano), and many of the notes of certain species go to 10,000 cycles or even considerably higher. There are many people who can't hear notes that high. This is particularly true of older people, for the ability to hear high frequencies drops off as we grow older, and many a bird student who is getting on in years has lamented the fact that he can't hear the high chickadee notes any more.

Some birds are known to have exceptionally high-pitched songs. One local observer tells of an experience when he lay on the ground listening to a hermit thrush sing in a nearby tree, and the song was made up of repetitions of more or less the same phrase in various pitches, some high and some low. In some cases, when the bird hit a particularly high pitch, the song ran out of the listener's hearing range. Several persons have reported watching a hummingbird singing on a twig, when the throat muscles of the bird could be seen at work but not a sound could be heard.

Of great help in the study of bird song have been the researches of Allen, Brand, and Kellogg at Cornell, already mentioned above. Their recordings of bird song on motion picture film and the subsequent analysis of the frequencies of the songs by inspecting the film under magnification have done much to clear up misconceptions and establish new factual material.

Warblers usually have quite high-pitched songs, the blackburnian and yellow being among those which Brand has mentioned in this respect. Some of the sparrows, also, sing in the higher frequencies, such as the grasshopper, savannah, and Henslow's sparrows. A few years ago a member of the Schenectady Bird Club was guiding a field trip and took occasion to call the attention of some of the beginners to the song of a savannah sparrow. Most of them heard it after a little careful listening, but one woman never was able to hear it, even though the leader moved his arm as a signal every time the bird sang and imitated the song to the best of his ability for her benefit.

FROM ONE PAIR of house wrens, two million birds could be produced in six years' time -- if all eggs hatched and all offspring bred and produced normal-

# FEATHERS

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## BIRDS AND THEIR ROLE IN MAN'S STRUGGLE TO CHECK VERMIN

By Alexander Sprunt, Jr., National Association of Audubon Societies

An Extract from a Talk, "Friends of the Farmer," Given by Mr. Sprunt over WGY  
On the Occasion of His Recent Visit Here to Address the  
Schenectady Bird Club

IT IS SO EVIDENT that we could not well live without the services of birds, that more of us ought to know why. It doesn't make any difference whether this service is wittingly or unwittingly given, the fact remains that we depend on wild life and other natural assets to continue our own existence.

There are various natural checks on the increase of life on this earth, which, unless they operate, would seriously militate against all other life. Birds might be said to be Nature's check on the increase of certain forms of life which would perhaps overrun everything if allowed to reproduce unchecked.

Take the small rodents, the rats and mice. These reproduce themselves in an amazingly rapid manner; in some species a litter of young will be brought forth every three weeks. Consider the vast numbers of eggs laid by many kinds of fish. Suppose all the rats and mice in a state were allowed to come to maturity and reproduce themselves for several seasons. Suppose that, in the sea, the fish did the same for some years. What would be the result? It would mean that sea and land would be overrun. As it is, such a condition does not come to pass, but this is only because something is operating to keep such life down to a normal level -- to what is usually referred to as the "balance of nature." This is where birds and other forms of

life come in.

Did you know that, if only one out of 12 eggs of the common house fly developed, the offspring from a single fly would amount to seven and a half billion in a single season? Did you know that a pair of potato beetles reproduces at a rate of 80,000,000 young in a season? Unless these creatures are checked in some way, the result is obvious. It has been estimated that the destruction caused by insects in this country amounts to \$20 per year for every man, woman, and child, or a total of two billion dollars.

Now what are the birds doing to help? It is said that birds in the state of Illinois destroy about 70 per cent of the annual insect "crop." Certainly this is a decided check. The bird population of Texas is estimated to need about 35,000 bushels of insects a day for food. Nesting meadowlarks in California have been known to consume 193 tons of insects daily in feeding their young. There are numbers of bird species which eat weed seeds and nothing else. Worms, borers, mosquitoes, bugs of various sorts -- all these form the diet of many birds. As bad as insects are today and as much harm and suffering as they cause, can you visualize what would happen if the very things that are holding them in check were removed? The world certainly would not be the pleasant place to live in that it is now.

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Barrington S. Havens, Editor, 63 No. Brandywine Avenue.

## CAPE COD IN OCTOBER

By Dorothy W. Caldwell.

PART OF MY 1939 vacation was spent at Barnstable, Mass., on Cape Cod in early October. It was a bit late for the shore bird migration and a bit early for the winter ducks, but in my two weeks of leisurely days at the Cape I had some delightful bird experiences.

The first came before I even arrived at Barnstable. Stopping for lunch I suddenly saw that the air was alive with tree swallows, a flock, probably of several hundred, milling about overhead. Several times afterward we saw a single tree swallow in graceful flight, but we didn't see the flock again until the day I left, and there, over the same spot, was the same or another equally large flock. It did seem so good to be seeing swallows again.

Barnstable Bay and the great Barnstable marshes, whether at high or ebb tide, were always full of beauty and interest, and many happy hours were spent loafing on the beach there, fraternizing with a friendly pair of plovers and watching flocks of yellowlegs flying about or feeding on the mud flats and black duck coming in and out of the marshes. Great blue herons were usually in evidence, and the herring gulls were always with us, and sometimes the laughing gulls were seen in their autumn attire. Once at high tide, near the town landing, I saw a loon and a couple of Holboell's grebes; once at the Yarmouth town landing I had fine views of a flock of black-bellied plovers.

The pine barrens of the Cape gave us chickadees, pine warblers, chipping sparrows, and, once, a brown creeper, as well as interesting vegetation and rich autumn colors.

Parts of several days were spent exploring the fascinating sand dunes of Sandy Neck, with their growth of yellow pines, hudsonia, polygonella, bearberry, and beach grass. On the Cape Cod Bay side of the long strip of dunes we found quite different birds than were visiting Barnstable Bay at this season. Great

skins of scoters were seen overhead -- mostly American and white-winged -- and on the beach were flocks of sanderlings with semipalmated plovers and semipalmated and least sandpipers.

When we visited the outer beaches at Chatham or Nauset, there were more sanderlings feeding daintily at the edge of the ocean, marching and countermarching on the beach or flying just above the surf, their white bodies flashing as they wheeled in the air. There we found black-backed gulls, ring-billed gulls, and cormorants, with the herring gulls, and occasionally the surf with other varieties of scoters. Once at Nauset we disturbed a duck hawk at his dinner on the beach, and another day we put up two Hudsonian curlews.

High spots in my stay were two afternoons at the Austin Ornithological Research Station, where we were privileged to accompany Dr. Austin as he made the rounds of his Italian nets and of his house traps. There I had my first experience with immature white-crowned sparrows, and needless to say I found having one in my hand for a few moments alongside a field sparrow was worth more than dozens of glances at their pictures on the printed page.

The last whole day at the Cape was perhaps the most thrilling of all. The wind was high and the surf at Nauset was magnificent. Cape Cod Bay was gray and sullen with many white caps. At First Encounter Beach we sat snugly in the car to see what we could see. A flock of red-backed sandpipers trotted back and forth on the beach or flew past nearby. Flocks of eider duck went by close over the surface of the water -- and very near the car -- the adult males striking in their white and black coats. The storm had driven many fish into the bay, and overhead the sky, as far as the eye could see in every direction, was full of gannets. There were many young birds with many adults in their beautiful white plumage. The fishing was good, and we watched the birds plunge and dive again and again, while hundreds more sailed majestically about. One could almost have believed that the entire gannet colony from Bonaventure Island was fishing there that day.

BIRD-LORE, in its September-October supplement, p.15, over the signature of The Schenectady Bird Club, has a summary of the 1939 Niskholm breeding-bird census.

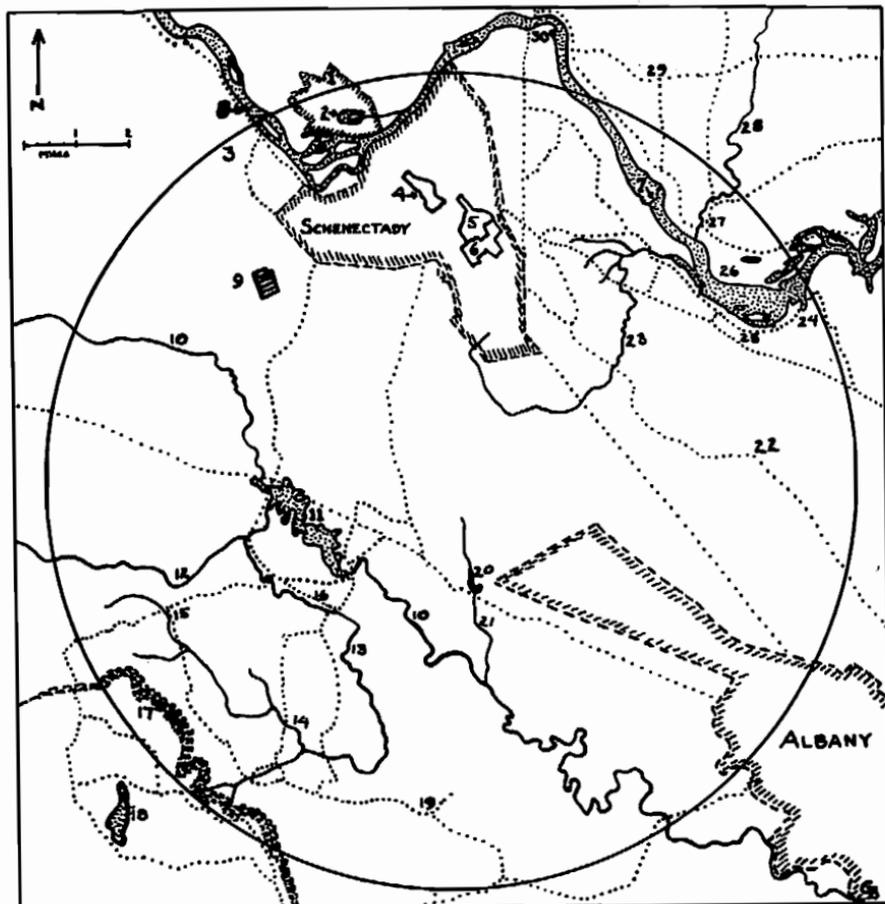
## SCHENECTADY'S TEN-YEAR RECORD OF CHRISTMAS CENSUSES

Some Statistics Concerning a Decade of Winter Field Trips, Showing How Common Are Crows, Starlings, and English Sparrows - 43,000 Individuals of 59 Species Listed within a Fifteen-mile Circle

By Guy Bartlett

IN EACH of the past 10 years a census count has been made of the birds of the vicinity of Schenectady at Christmas time, usually on the Saturday nearest to that day. Except for one census in 1929

all have been made within a circle fifteen miles in diameter, and roughly bounded by Lock 8, Mohawk View, and Indian Ladder. Some counts have been made by lone observers; in other years as



-- Adapted from U. S. Geological Survey Topographical Maps  
(Streams shown with solid lines; dotted lines show some of roads)

- |                          |                           |                    |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Scotia                | 11. Watervliet Reservoir  | 21. Hunger Kill    |
| 2. Collins Lake          | 12. Bosen Kill            | 22. Albany Airport |
| 3. Woestina Sanctuary    | 13. Black Creek           | 23. Lisha Kill     |
| 4. Vale Cemetery         | 14. Meadowdale            | 24. Mohawk View    |
| 5. Central Park          | 15. Altamont              | 25. Crescent Lake  |
| 6. Parkview Cemetery     | 16. Guilderland Center    | 26. Vischers Ponds |
| 7. Lock 7, Mohawk River  | 17. Helderberg Escarpment | 27. Vischers Ferry |
| 8. Lock 8, Mohawk River  | 18. Thompson's Lake       | 28. Stony Creek    |
| 9. U. S. Army Warehouses | 19. Voorheesville         | 29. Groom Corners  |
| 10. Normans Kill         | 20. Guilderland Reservoir | 30. Aqueduct       |

## FEATHERS

DECEMBER, 1939

CHRISTMAS, 1929-1938	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	Yrs&Totals
Date	Dec.23	Dec.23	Dec.21	Dec.26	Dec.26	Dec.26	
Number of species	32	31	26	27	35	34	59
Number of individuals	2010	7390	3070	2444	2609	4439	42,859
Others on near dates (#)	1						
Time	7 - 5	7 - 5	7 - 4	7 - 4	7 - 5	7 - 5	
Temperature	20-29	7-18	5-10	38-56	30-45	18-30	5 - 56
Wind	0	0	vstr W	sl SW	0-mNW	0	
Weather	cloudy	cloudy	cloudy	cloudy	p old	clear	
Number of observers	14	13	12	13	20	22	60
Man-hours afield	140	130	108	117	200	76	1157
Miles on foot						72	
Horned Grebe							1- 1
Mallard							1- 9
Red-legged Black Duck	1	3		12		2	5- 41
American Golden-eye			1		2		3- 14
American Merganser	45	2	2		3	7	9- 157
Red-breasted Merganser							1- 24
Goshawk				1		1	3- 3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1						1- 1
Red-tailed Hawk			2	1	5		4- 9
Red-shouldered Hawk					2	1	4- 7
Rough-legged Hawk					1	1	4- 5
Marsh Hawk	1	1			1	3	6- 9
Sparrow Hawk	1	2	1	5	8	7	9- 36
Ruffed Grouse	8	2	6	9	13	7	9- 72
European Partridge							1- 7
Ring-necked Pheasant	54	16	7	9	15	8	10- 134
Herring Gull	10	2	2	3	2	3	10- 51
Ring-billed Gull							1- 3
Mourning Dove		5	1			1	3- 7
Screech Owl	2				1	1	6- 7
Great Horned Owl	2	1		1	1		5- 8
Snowy Owl					1		1- 1
Barred Owl	1	1	1				6- 8
Long-eared Owl					6		1- 6
Belted Kingfisher	4	1		3	1	1	8- 15
Pileated Woodpecker							2- 4
Hairy Woodpecker	5	3	3	6	9	8	8- 49
Downy Woodpecker	19	26	12	19	34	28	10- 186
Northern Horned Lark		15					2- 25
Prairie Horned Lark	18	5	32		3	3	6- 81
Blue Jay	19	24	12	24	47	24	10- 233
Crow	550	1750	1300	882	644	2800	10-16,557
Black-capped Chickadee	76	188	77	242	212	249	10- 1,580
White-breasted Nuthatch	25	34	7	48	36	47	10- 239
Red-breasted Nuthatch	2				2	1	5- 11
Brown Creeper	2	9	3	5	7	2	9- 59
Winter Wren	1	1		2	1	1	7- 12
Robin						1	2- 2
Hermit Thrush					1		1- 1
Bluebird					4		1- 4
Golden-crowned Kinglet	9	27		4	8	14	8- 111
Cedar Waxwing	3				5	3	3- 11
Northern Shrike	1	2	1	2			6- 10
Sterling	700	3943	933	772	839	610	10-15,192
English Sparrow	180	495	221	193	418	369	10- 4,268
Meadowlark						1	2- 6
Red-wing			1				3- 4
Cowbird				2			2- 77
Evening Grosbeak							1- 12
Purple Finch							2- 16
Fine Grosbeak						4	3- 11
Redpoll			110				3- 122
Goldfinch	12	374	14	34	52	10	10- 636
Slate-colored Junco	29	21	11	62	16	30	9- 229
Tree Sparrow	211	296	296	93	197	186	10- 1,959
Swamp Sparrow	4						1- 4
Song Sparrow	14	43	11	4	12	5	9- 125
Lapland Longspur		1					1- 1
Snow Bunting	#	35		2			2- 37

CHRISTMAS, 1929 - 1938	1929-1	1929-2	1930	1931-1	1931-2	1932-1	1932-2
Date	Dec.23	Dec.22	Dec.21	Dec.26	Dec.27	Dec.24	Dec.26
Number of species	15	9	28	34	11	29	22
Number of individuals	838	191	3100	7566	202	7700	1300
Others on near dates (#)	3		5			1	
Time	7 - 5	8 - 2	7 - 4	6 - 5	8:30-2	7 - 5	7 - 4
Temperature	8-16	26-30	35-42	15-20	12-32	32-45	32-40
Wind	sl N	sl W	sl W	vstrNW	sl NW	0	0-strW
Weather	cloudy	snow	p old	clear	clear	clear	p old
Number of observers	6	1	5	16	1	10	15
Man-hours afield	19	5	45	176	6	100	135
Miles on foot	9	4	17	30	10	20	20
Horned Grebe						1	
Mallard				9			
Red-legged Black Duck				23			
American Golden-eye			#	11			
American Merganser	3		7	66		22	
Red-breasted Merganser				24			
Goshawk			1				
Sharp-shinned Hawk			#				
Red-tailed Hawk				1			
Red-shouldered Hawk		3	1				
Rough-legged Hawk			2	1			
Marsh Hawk			1	2			
Sparrow Hawk			2	3		6	1
Ruffed Grouse			1	13		4	9
European Partridge						7	
Ring-necked Pheasant		3	8	6		5	1
Herring Gull	1	2	2	23		1	
Ring-billed Gull				3			
Mourning Dove							
Screech Owl	#		1	1		1	
Great Horned Owl						#	3
Snowy Owl							
Barred Owl			1	1		1	2
Long-eared Owl							
Belted Kingfisher			1	1		1	2
Pileated Woodpecker			3				1
Hairy Woodpecker			#	5		6	4
Downy Woodpecker	1	1	3	8	2	23	10
Northern Horned Lark	10						
Prairie Horned Lark			#			20	
Blue Jay	3		15	5	2	48	10
Crow	375	27	1617	2000	12	4200	400
Black-capped Chickadee	9	7	85	88	20	163	164
White-breasted Nuthatch	#	2	7	5		20	18
Red-breasted Nuthatch			4		2		
Brown Creeper			2	13	3	10	3
Winter Wren				3		3	
Robin						1	
Hermit Thrush							
Bluebird							
Golden-crowned Kinglet			19	6		6	18
Cedar Waxwing							
Northern Shrike			3			1	
Starling	268	129	945	3600	53	2200	200
English Sparrow	90	17	135	1400		650	100
Meadowlark							5
Red-wing				2		1	
Cowbird				75			
Evening Grosbeak	12						
Purple Finch	10			6			
Fine Grosbeak	5				2		
Redpoll	18				1		
Goldfinch	6		5	9	35	30	55
Slate-colored Junco	#		30	23		7	70
Tree Sparrow	27		192	121	70	214	56
Swamp Sparrow							
Song Sparrow			7	7		21	1
Lapland Longspur							
Snow Bunting							

many as two dozen observers have helped.

The number of species of observed birds varied from 9 to 35 and the number of individuals from as few as 200 to as many as 7700. Weather conditions have varied as much; temperatures have been as low as 5 F and as high as 56 F, in one case there was a very strong west wind to accompany the low temperature, and in two cases there were snowstorms.

#### Seen Every Year

Fifty-nine species have been included in the decade of observations, but only 11 species have been recorded each year. These have been the ring-necked pheasant, herring gull, downy woodpecker, blue jay, crow, black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, starling, English sparrow, goldfinch, and tree sparrow. Next to be dropped from this list of "seen every year" will probably be the herring gull. There is a minimum of open water within the census circle at Christmas time, and on a few occasions only lone gulls have been seen.

In only one year each have six species been missed. They are the American merganser, sparrow hawk, ruffed grouse, brown creeper, slate-colored junco, and song sparrow. The belted kingfisher, hairy woodpecker, and golden-crowned kinglet have each been seen eight years, and the winter wren seven years. Another five have been recorded six times: Marsh hawk, screech and barred owls, prairie horned lark, and northern shrike. At the other end of the list are 13 species seen in only one of the 10 years: Horned grebe, mallard, red-breasted merganser, sharp-shinned hawk, Hungarian partridge, ring-billed gull, snowy owl, long-eared owl, hermit thrush, bluebird, evening grosbeak, swamp sparrow, and Lapland longspur. Twenty other species have been recorded two to five years each.

#### Crow, 39%; Starling, 35%

It is difficult for Schenectadians to think of the crow as other than a superabundant bird during the winter, but it is only necessary to go as far east as Pittsfield or to Fort Plain on the west or Binghamton on the south to learn that winter crows in those sections are almost rarities. Near Schenectady there are two large roosts, one in the Carman section and one near Mechanicville, and it is mostly the flights to and from those roosts that fill the skies in early morning and late afternoon.

The ten-year census total for all species totals 42,859 counted birds. The crow, with 16,587, accounts for 39% of

the count. The starling, with 15,192, has 35%; the English sparrow, a poor third with 4268, for 10%. Together, these three total 84%.

Only five species - these three and the tree sparrow, 1959, and chickadee, 1580, have shown counts of more than a thousand for the 10-year totals. Together they add up to 92% of all seen.

Only 10 other species have shown total counts of more than 100 individuals. Barring such things as an unexpected invasion of local territory by enormous flocks of purple finches, such as New England experienced last winter, or by similar flocks of redpolls, snow buntings, or such species, it will probably be many years before the count of another species attains 1000 individuals, for the goldfinch is sixth in abundance with 636. Then in succession are the junco, 299; white-breasted nuthatch, 239; blue jay, 233; downy woodpecker, 186; American merganser, 157; pheasant, 134; redpoll, 129; song sparrow, 125; and golden-crowned kinglet, 111. These 15 species together accounted for 97%.

The next 20 species have totals of more than 10 but less than 100, with the prairie horned lark apparently the next to reach that figure. It is interesting to note that of all the birds of prey which have been included - seven species of hawks and five of owls -- only one, the sparrow hawk, has attained a total of more than 10 in 10 years. At the foot of the list are 24 species of fewer than 10, with five of them including only lone individuals: Horned grebe, sharp-shinned hawk, snowy owl, hermit thrush, and Lapland longspur.

#### Out-of-season

Of the 59 species included, most of them are regular winter visitors or permanent residents. Some were common or scarce according to the amount of ice on the river, such as the five kinds of ducks and two of gulls. Others, as the evening grosbeak, snowy owl, and Lapland longspur are in the category of occasional winter visitors. Some, such as the horned grebe, mourning dove, kingfisher, robin, hermit thrush, bluebird, cedar waxwing, meadowlark, red-wing, and cowbird, are more commonly summer residents or transients, and occur in winter only occasionally or accidentally.

As the censuses are continued in future years there is no doubt about more species being added to the total; there are several additional species recognized as winter visitors, and there is the possibility of the accidental.

## BIRDS AT HOME

By George &amp; Ann Baisbridge

AFTER BECOMING more seriously interested in birds, it appeared that the birds, like charity, might well begin at home. From educational and interest viewpoints this is particularly true, because there they are -- the birds, of course -- right in your own bailiwick for casual notice or more detailed study if you prefer.

In fact, "birds at home" has become a game with us, full of zest and interest to see who can add a new bird to the list, learn another bird song, or make some new (to us, at least) observation. It is a sort of exploration which can be carried on at home. Thus one learns for himself bird song identification, habits and manners, of the different species, breeding and feeding facts, and many other items of interest. Apart from the educational value of observation with both eyes and ears and the pleasure which any hobby affords, especially later in life, there is also a definite possibility of adding to the existing local bird lore and records.

While we have kept records for practically six years, at the beginning the species alone were recorded, without regard to dates. More recently attempts have been made to record early and late dates, breeding records, and other items of interest. In these six years 63 different species have been recorded, as follows:

Great blue heron, common black duck, goshawk, sparrow hawk, ring-necked pheasant, killdeer, herring gull, mourning dove, black-billed cuckoo, screech owl, whip-poor-will, nighthawk, chimney swift, hummingbird, flicker, hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, crested flycatcher, phoebe, wood pewee, barn swallow, blue jay, crow, chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, house wren, catbird, brown thrasher, robin, wood thrush, hermit thrush, olive-backed thrush, veery, bluebird, golden-crowned kinglet, ruby-crowned kinglet, cedar waxwing, starling, yellow-throated vireo, red-eyed vireo, warbling vireo, black and white warbler, yellow warbler, magnolia warbler, northern yellowthroat, American redstart, English sparrow, meadowlark, Baltimore oriole, bronzed grackle, cowbird, scarlet tanager, purple finch, goldfinch, grasshopper sparrow, vesper sparrow, slate-colored junco, tree sparrow, chipping sparrow, field sparrow, white-throated sparrow,

and song sparrow.

The smallest number of species in one year was 33 in 1935, and the greatest was 42 in 1939. Only six species have fed at our winter feeding stations; viz., starling, English sparrow, black-capped chickadee, goldfinch, tree sparrow, and junco.

Of course all of the 63 species recorded were not right in our own lot but were seen or heard from there. For example, the great blue heron, black duck, goshawk, sparrow hawk, killdeer, herring gull, nighthawk, chimney swift, and others were observed flying overhead. Of the 63 species, 20 were recorded every year, and 17 have been recorded but once. Eighteen species have bred locally, on our lot or close by.

It is with regret that we recall the bluebirds which in 1934 were contemplating nesting in one of our birdhouses only to be driven off by house wrens. It was then that we learned what a despicable disposition the house wren has. Thenceforth the house wren has been unwelcome, but the bluebirds never returned to nest. The problem is how to keep the small but persistent house wrens out of a birdhouse with a doorway large enough for a bluebird without corking the hole and thus barring both. Calculus is of no use here, and one just doesn't shoot house wrens. We have even seen the wrens usurp a birdhouse in which English sparrows had just built a nest, literally throwing out the nesting material after ejecting the sparrows.

Have you ever watched the flicker thrusting his long bill into an ant hole to lick up the ants with his sticky tongue? When you try to raise a lawn in sandy soil, you just wish for more and more flickers for less and less ants.

Each year, about the last week of April, adults of the white-throated sparrow visit us. We have no record of their song at this time, but their slurred "tseet" call note is almost unmistakable. However, in the late summer and early fall (the latest date was October 20, this year), we have the immature male birds of the year, and they try to sing. Their attempts to achieve what is to us one of the most appealing of bird songs are amusing, but the song is, nevertheless, recognizable. Next year it will ring true from some mountain fastness to the delight of the traveler of the trails. Indeed we shall never forget, while camping one night on a mountain top during a terrific thunderstorm, the lone white throat which sang, after every tremendous crash.

## THE SEASON - Autumn, 1939

THE RED-THROATED loon, double-crested cormorant, European baldpate, purple and white-rumped sandpipers, and Nelson's sparrows were among the most interesting of the autumn records in the vicinity of Schenectady.

A red-throated loon tarried below Lock 7 on November 11, close enough to shore so that the upturned bill and other field marks were easily noted; none had been recorded here since 1935. On October 7 a double-crested cormorant was seen at Crescent Lake (Moore).

Ducks on the Crescent Lake section of the river were estimated at about 5000 just before hunting season opened, far more than in other recent years. A decidedly lower count was immediately apparent with the opening of the season, not because all were shot but because all made quick departures. Bags of hunters did contain some interesting specimens, however. Black ducks heavily predominated in the take, but included were at least three wood ducks (for which fines were collected), a few gadwalls, a male European baldpate on October 22 (with the hunter reporting that another had been shot the previous day there by a second hunter), a redhead on November 11, and a canvasback on November 12. The usual variety of ducks were to be seen there through the autumn in small numbers, usually far out from the gun-infested marshes.

A purple sandpiper was seen on the rocks out in the river at the base of Lock 7 on November 26. Along with red-backed sandpipers on the Crescent Lake shore on November 4 were two white-rumped sandpipers (Moore).

The first snowy owl was reported on November 3, an early date, in the city (Joseph McCormick, Jr.).

The ruby-throated hummingbird set a new late departure date, September 26 (Steele).

A Nelson's sparrow, also in the Crescent Lake section, was recorded October 7 (Moore); two were recorded in that section in October, 1937 (See Auk, LV, 1938, p.546). The vesper sparrow, here until November 19 (Hollister), set a new departure date.

Also of interest were the rough-legged hawk on November 12 (Moore); five pine grosbeaks November 26 (Bainbridge); and cedar waxwings through November.

Following a duration of drought conditions, September had 5½ inches of rain, slightly above normal, and an average temperature of 62.2 degrees, also above normal. October was cold and wet, with an average temperature, 48.9 degrees, below normal, and 2.8 inches of rain, a little above normal. November had about normal temperature, and contributed heavily to the year's shortage of rainfall, with a period of nearly three weeks with no precipitation.

Those intending to submit records for inclusion in the annual summary, to be published in the January FEATHERS, are asked to prepare them as quickly as possible. Most records can be completed now, and additions made if necessary for the remainder of the year. Summaries should be sent to the Record Committee or the Editor, from either of whom blank check-lists can be obtained for the purpose. G.B.

### DON'T MISS THE NEXT MEETING IF YOU PLAN TO TAKE PART IN THE CHRISTMAS CENSUS

ALTHOUGH CHRISTMAS Bird Lore censuses have been conducted in this territory for many years, this year will mark the first opportunity for the Schenectady Bird Club to conduct one. Plans are now under way to make it a really bang-up affair.

Our December meeting, to be held on the 18th in the Schenectady Museum at 8 o'clock, will be given over entirely to arrangements for the Christmas census. All those who take part in this event have been appointed members of a Census Committee, of which B.D. Miller has been made chairman. If you plan to take part in the census, therefore, you should by all means be present at the December meeting.

The census is scheduled for Saturday, December 23. As usual, the census-takers will be divided into groups, each group covering a specific territory and reporting to Mr. Miller at the close of the day.

At the pre-census meeting the matter of who shall cover what territories will be settled, and other details of the affair will be arranged. If you just can't be there but expect to take part in the census, it is suggested that you arrange for someone to report to you after the meeting and speak for you at the meeting.