

(Published in The Cleveland Audubon Society Bulletin,
Volume 2, Number 8, August 1956, pp. 7-15)

Vol. 52, No. 2

March, April, May 1956

THE CLEVELAND BIRD CALENDAR

Spring Number

Published By

Cleveland Audubon Society
and
The Kirtland Bird Club

Editor
Donald L. Newman

Associate Editor
Lucille Maly

CONTRIBUTORS

Fred J. Ackermann
James F. Akers
L. P. Barbour
Mrs. Robert V. D. Booth
Vera Carrothers
W. W. Coleman
Owen Davies
Leo Deininger
Ralph W. Dexter
William A. Dexter
C. T. Downer
Adela Gaede
Carl F. Hamann

Stephen T. Harty
Neil Henderson
Raymond W. Hill
Debbie Hunsberger
Perry F. Johnson
George King
William & Nancy Klamm
Charles H. Knight
Hilda Lebold
Robert & Lucille Maly
Gene Morton
Donald L. Newman
Margaret Perner

Marjorie Ramisch
Bertram & Margaret Raynes
Paul H. Savage
Margaret H. Sherwin
M. B. Skaggs
Jean A. Staiger
Sue Storer
Elliot Tramer
Allen E. Valentine
Joel & Gene Wachtel
Harold E. Wallin
I. R. Watts
Gale Wiley

SUMMARY OF WEATHER CONDITIONS

From U. S. Weather Bureau Reports (Cleveland Hopkins Airport)

March - Warm for the first 11 days, with a new high of 66° for the 7th of the month. Thereafter temperatures averaged below normal. Precipitation, which was well distributed throughout the month, was 1.71 inches above normal and included 4.4 inches of snow on the 16th.

April - Abnormally warm weather during the first week was followed by a protracted cold spell that prevailed until the last few days. Though precipitation was slightly above normal, snowfall was light and rainfall was evenly distributed over the month.

May - With the exception of a warm spell from the 10th through the 14th, temperatures averaged below normal. Precipitation of 5.49 inches was nearly twice the normal amount, while the total hours of sunshine were only 54% of the total possible hours.

All records, observations, and comments should be sent to Donald L. Newman, 14174 Superior Road, Cleveland 18, Ohio.

COMMENT ON THE SEASON

Jointly sponsored by the Cleveland Metropolitan Park Board, the Audubon Society, and the Museum of Natural History, the Sunday Morning Bird Walks were again conducted for six successive weeks, from April 15 to May 20, at 13 stations within the Cleveland region. In the entire 23-year history of this activity the spring of 1956 established a new record for total species observed: 197. The largest number of species recorded on any one of the six Sundays this season was 145 on May 13.

With its busy lakefront both onshore and offshore and the small amount of marsh and sandy beach areas, the very nature of our Cleveland region severely restricts our observation of waterfowl, marsh, and shore birds. For that reason it is impossible to gain even a general impression of the spring migration of these classes of birds from the few records we have. One exception, however, is the Ring-billed Gull whose numbers gradually increased from a mere seven reported along the lakefront on March 3, to some 1600 or more on March 17. On the previous day there was apparently a major gull return at Edgewater Park despite a snowfall of more than four inches and a stiff northeast wind (Klamm). The Ring-bills remained in numbers until March 25, when nearly 1300 were reported, but in the following week these gulls disappeared so that on April 1, a mere 13 were reported. Neither the Herring nor the Bonaparte's Gull was observed in any sizable flock.

During the first ten days of May the weather was decidedly cool, with scattered rainfall and considerable cloudiness, and the wind largely from the north and northeast. On the 11th, conditions changed as the temperature rose into the 80's, the sky brightened, and the wind shifted to the south; the next two days saw similar weather though the wind came from the south and southwest. It was on these three days, May 11 through 13, that a tremendous wave of flycatchers, thrushes, vireos, warblers, orioles, tanagers, and grosbeaks surged through our region. Especially numerous on May 13, were the Least Flycatcher, Olive-backed Thrush, Magnolia, Myrtle, and Chestnut-sided Warblers, and the Ovenbird. On May 11, a "sizable but rapidly moving group of warblers passed through the eastern edge of Westlake — nine species . . . being recorded in less than 15 minutes" (Valentine). One veteran observer stated that the warbler wave of May 12 and 13 "was more concentrated in this area for sheer numbers" than any he could recall except for a wave observed in May 1943 (Skaggs). He also submitted a tabulation of 108 species observed in Lake County on May 12 and 13, among which were 28 species of warblers.

Although this three-day flood of birds was the most spectacular period of the migratory movement, several other more limited migrations were reported. At Clague Park on March 18, groups of a few to several hundred Bronzed Grackles flying out of the southwest against the wind were constantly in view during 45 minutes of observation, many of them settling in the trees bordering the area (Klamm). Between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. on April 5, at Berea Metropolitan Park, a "definite influx of migrating birds was noted. Flickers, Redwings, and Goldfinches were particularly prominent. Redwings were flying mostly westward in small loose flocks. Goldfinches seemed to be singing everywhere, the males just beginning to show traces of summer plumage" (Akers). On April 28, at Perkins Beach, Redwings were "proceeding east along the lake in small groups

COMMENT ON THE SEASON (Cont'd.)

continuously" (Klamm).

In the case of the thrushes, three species were quite tardy. Although the Wood Thrush, whose average date of arrival is April 19, was first reported on April 22 -just two birds — it was still scarce at the end of that month, and not until about May 5, did it appear in large numbers. The Hermit Thrush, whose average date of arrival is March 25, did not become numerous until mid-April after which it was commonly reported to about May 6. The Veery, too, was late in arriving, with only a solitary individual recorded in April, on the 28th. Yet the thrushes as a group were most abundant this spring. There were many more records of the Veery than in the spring of 1955, but even more notable was the abundance of Gray-checked Thrushes, which were regularly reported from April 29 to May 31. Exclusive of the birds observed on the Sunday Morning Bird Walks (whose records are not included in this report except where specifically mentioned), there were 39 records of the Gray-checked Thrush this spring totaling 74 individuals as compared with three records of three individuals last spring. Not in at least the last ten years has this species been so numerous in our region.

In addition to the Veery and the Gray-checked Thrush there were three other species which were remarkably abundant. For the Mourning Warbler, of which there was just one record of two birds last spring, there were 17 records totaling 19 individuals. The White-crowned Sparrow was also much more numerous, particularly in the period from May 4 through the 13th. In the spring of 1955 the Fox Sparrow was reported only from March 31 to April 11 -- just six records of 13 birds -- while in the present spring this species occurred regularly from March 10 to May 8, with a total of 80 individuals out of 33 records. Also, seemingly more common (though because of its retiring habits we cannot be sure) was the Lincoln's Sparrow, for which we had eight records, all of single birds, as compared with just a lone record of one bird in the spring of 1955.

While they were in no sense abundant, three species -- Cliff Swallow, Migrant Shrike, and Golden-winged Warbler -- were more frequently reported than last spring or in other recent seasons. The Cliff Swallow was observed in seven different areas, and there was one report of a small breeding colony on a farm near Fowlers Mill (King). For the Migrant Shrike we had seven records, among which were a breeding pair in Waite Hill (Sherwin) and a probable breeding pair in Aurora Township (Hamann). Although there were only nine records for the Golden-winged Warbler, two of those records were of an exceptional number of individuals: five in Chestnut Hill Cemetery, Cuyahoga Falls, on May 6 (Staiger), and a total of eight observed on the Bird Walk at Elyria on May 13. Of these eight birds -- all of them males and most of them singing -- three were together while the others were scattered among the host of warblers concentrated in the Black River Valley where they "seemed to have been halted by weather conditions and were spending the morning feeding" (Johnson). Apparently the Golden-wing occurs more regularly and more numerous in the Elyria area than elsewhere in our region, for a close observer of the birds of that locale reports it is seen "in two years out of three and sometimes on two or three different dates in a year," with occasionally as many as three birds being observed on a single day (Johnson).

Although the warblers as a group were more abundant than they were last spring, the Tennessee and Bay-breasted Warblers were notably scarce. For the former

COMMENT ON THE SEASON (Cont'd.)

there was just one record of as many as ten birds (on May 20), and the total of individuals reported for the entire season was only 26 based upon 11 records. Similarly, the Bay-breasted Warbler, though more common than the Tennessee, was never recorded in large numbers. Even at the peak period on May 13, a total of only a dozen birds was reported, and on that same date the Sunday Morning Bird Walks produced a total of just 49 individuals, of which 50% were observed at Elyria. Yet it is interesting to note that at Ashtabula, just outside our region to the east, the Bay-breasted Warbler, among several others, was described as "especially more abundant" (Savage).

In the spring of 1955 the Slate-colored Junco population sharply decreased after about April 18, and by May 1, only a few scattered individuals remained. This spring, however, the Junco was abundant throughout April, with the population reaching a high point on the last few days of the month; and a fair number of these birds lingered during the first eight days of May. In contrast to the Junco, the White-throated Sparrow, which in the spring of 1955 first appeared in numbers about April 17, was extraordinarily scarce until the last of April. During the first 26 days of that month there were just two records of a single bird each, but on April 28 and 29, a multitude of White-throats arrived and they remained in large numbers until about May 13. One other species deserving comment is the Purple Finch, which was numerous from mid-April to mid-May, flocks of from 20 to 70 birds being reported.

It may be significant for the future that this spring produced a total of four reports of the Mockingbird — more spring records for this species than we have had in many years. These records, all of single birds, came from the following widely separated localities: April 28, Perkins Beach; April 29, North Rocky River; May 13, Black Brook; May 15 and 16, Waite Hill, where this particular bird was feeding in a newly ploughed field in the company of three Pipits, some 50 Kingbirds, and many Bobolinks, Meadowlarks, Redwings, Robins, and Bluebirds (Sherwin). In addition, a Mockingbird was observed on May 5, on a farm near Ashtabula, which lies not far beyond the eastern border of our region (Savage).

To summarize, the following conclusions seem justified on the basis of a careful examination of the occurrence dates of the various passerine species: (1) In general the vanguard of these northbound birds appeared in some numbers at about the average dates of arrival shown in *Birds of Cleveland*. (2) There were of course occasional birds of many species which arrived somewhat in advance of the front rank of the main body of migrants, but these early birds did not disturb the picture of a migration that was largely on schedule. (3) May 11 through the 13th was the principal peak period. (4) At least five species were exceptionally abundant -- the Gray-cheeked Thrush, Veery, Mourning Warbler, White-crowned Sparrow, and Fox Sparrow.

For annotation in the *Birds of Cleveland* is the following new earliest date of spring arrival: Solitary Sandpiper (1) - April 7, Clague Pond (Davies).

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS

Snowy Egret - When this bird rose out of the marsh at Black Brook on May 20, its "golden slippers" clearly identified it to the assembled Sunday Morning Bird Walkers. Our last

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

previous record was of a bird at the Lower Shaker Lake on May 18, 1953.

Whistling Swan - A flock of 16 remained on Twin Lakes and the nearby ponds of Hill's Fish Hatchery in early April (R. Dexter). This is noteworthy because this species, which is less frequently reported in the spring, does not often linger here in any numbers.

European Widgeon - One at the Holden Arboretum Bird Walk on April 22, was the first reported in our region since March 1954.

Surf Scoter - First observed by Mrs. E. L. Weber early on the morning of May 8, at Lower Shaker Lake, this sea duck remained throughout the day sleeping much of the time but affording many observers an opportunity to study him in good sunlight through a telescope. Typical of the first-year male, he had only the white patch on the nape rather than on both the nape and forehead. Yet he was a handsome bird, the head "an almost iridescent purple in some lights and the bill a startling combination of white, black, and orange-red which flashed in the sun" (Carrothers). This is the first and only spring record.

Pigeon Hawk - Seen on April 22, in Chestnut Hill Cemetery, Cuyahoga Falls (Wiley), this is the first report of this falcon since May 10, 1952.

Yellow Rail - Found dead in Lorain on April 22 (Lebold). One of the few records we have for this species, which was last reported on July 5, 1944, near the mouth of the Chagrin River.

Dowitcher - To be added to our three previous records of this rare spring migrant is a report of a bird feeding along the sandy beach near the mouth of the Grand River on May 13, when it was observed by the Sunday Morning Bird Walkers and definitely identified by Paul Smith.

Glaucous Gull - Among the numerous company of Ring-billed Gulls at Gordon Park on March 17, was this white wing-tipped "Burgomaster," which species had not been reported in our region since January 1, 1953.

White-eyed Vireo - The Bird Walkers at Elyria and Bedford each recorded one individual on May 13.

Worm-eating Warbler - Shortly after noon on May 11, four of these rare birds were discovered in the backyard of a home in Lakewood, where they remained for about 15 minutes feeding on the ground or in the low shrubbery and uttering an occasional call note (Davies). This is the only record in the last ten years.

Brewster's Warbler - In association with a mixed flock of warblers, including many Blue-winged, this rare hybrid was feeding along the edge of a second-growth woods in Elmwood Park, Rocky River, on May 11 (Morton). Not since May 18, 1952 had this species been reported in our region

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

Black-throated Gray Warbler - Our ninth record of this accidental visitor is of a single bird seen on May 20, at the Holden Arboretum Bird Walk and identified by B. P. Bole who is acquainted with the species in its breeding range.

Sycamore Warbler - First observed by Dr. William Solomon on April 29, in the Shaker Lakes Bird Sanctuary, this western race of the Yellow-throated Warbler (its lores noticeably white) remained throughout most of the following day. Keeping largely to the trees and bushes along the brook, the bird sallied out after insects and even sang infrequently (Wachtel). A second bird was seen in the South Rocky River Reservation on May 20 (Davies).

Prairie Warbler - A vigorously singing male was observed at Aurora Pond on the morning of May 13 (Carrothers), which is the first record of occurrence since the early 1940's.

Kentucky Warbler - Not reported since May 24, 1953, when one was seen in Elyria, this species was found in three different areas this spring: May 6, Cuyahoga Falls (Staiger and Wiley); May 9, Hinckley, where the bird had become trapped in a garage and succumbed soon after it was rescued (Coleman); and May 12, one found dead in Elyria (Johnson). The Cuyahoga Falls bird, which was observed in Chestnut Hill Cemetery, was feeding on the ground in the cover of shrubbery near a pool, and it sang quite often (Wiley). It was said to have remained in the Cemetery for about two weeks (Staiger).

Orchard Oriole - A singing male at Willoughby on May 19 (Skaggs) is our only record for this spring.

Dickcissel - Identified first by its "dry, sparrow-like song", this bird of the grasslands later perched on an upright stalk in a cornfield near Chardon on May 13, affording a full view of the black bill and yellow breast (Ramisch). A second record is of two birds observed on May 20, at the Gates Mills Bird Walk.

Pine Grosbeak - For about two weeks in March a small band of these birds (five on the 18th) tarried in the vicinity of the Carl Newhous residence just southwest of Painesville, where they fed on the seeds of the hemlock trees about six feet from the bedroom window or sometimes dropped to the ground under a group of sheltering pines (Booth).

Red Crossbill - Six birds of this species, which had not been reported in our region since May 28, 1953, were seen by the Bird Walkers at Lower Shaker Lake on April 15, and were still present on the 22nd (Tramer).

White-winged Crossbill - All three of the reports of this winter visitor came from the Chagrin River area and from points not far distant from one another, suggesting the possibility that a single flock may have divided into smaller units: March 4, an estimated 25 in the hemlocks on one of the ridges in North Chagrin Reservation (Perner); March 25, four on the Sherwin Farm in Waite Hill; April 1, a band of 11 consisting of both sexes feeding in the jack pines on the Manakiki Golf Course.

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

Gambel's Sparrow - Trapped and banded in Willoughby on May 13 (Skaggs), this bird becomes the seventh representative of this western race of the Eastern White-crowned Sparrow to be reported in our region, all of the records coming from just this one observer.

Smith's Longspur - On the morning of April 29, a flock of from 25 to 30 birds, presumably though not certainly all of this species, was discovered feeding near the runway at the Cuyahoga County Airport, Richmond Heights. They were difficult to approach and difficult to see because they blended so well with the coarse turf. Eventually, however, two birds were studied as they "crouched in plain view more or less motionless. The closer was a male . . . which showed unmarked, bright buffy underparts, breast, and throat and a very clear black and white face pattern, including a small white triangle near the ear. The white was entirely surrounded by a band of black . . . while the buffy of the underparts extended in a collar behind the neck. The other bird had similarly buffy underparts, but the rest was a general brown color with no distinct face pattern. There was a dime-sized clear white shoulder patch on this bird not noticed on the other" (Henderson). These visual marks together with the harsh flight notes served to identify these particular two birds as the Smith's Longspur; and it is probable that the rest of the flock were of this same species, for no Lapland Longspurs, which is the typical wintering species, were observed.

Although the Airport was visited by a number of observers during the next two weeks, the flock of Longspurs was not seen again, but on May 6, 13, and 16, a single bird was observed and identified as this species. Of the three previous records for the region, the most recent are May 8, and May 24, 1924.

From a Neighboring Locality

Brant - A flock of 27 of this Atlantic coastal bird was first sighted on May 20, at Walnut Beach, Ashtabula, where it remained until May 25. These small geese sometimes rested on a sand bar which could be approached within 200 feet by car without disturbing them. On two occasions they were observed as they flew in, circled several times, and then settled on the bar, "their honk as they came in seeming softer than that of the Canada Goose" (Savage). For the Cleveland region there are just two records of this accidental migrant.

FIELD NOTES

Cooper's Hawk Kills a Pheasant. A cold wind was blowing on March 31, but ducks, geese, and swans were in migration in northern Ohio and nearly every lake or large pond had waterfowl on it. My wife Marion and I saw Whistling Swans at three places and noted quite a few ducks at Pymatuning Lake, astride the Ohio-Pennsylvania line.

As we drove along toward home, we saw a small roadside pond, no more than 60 feet from the highway, with a half dozen ducks swimming about. We stopped our car and noted that some of the birds were Blue-winged Teal. Then while looking through her field glasses, Marion suddenly exclaimed, "Look at the hawk!" Between the road and the pond we saw a large Cooper's Hawk standing on a female pheasant that had just been killed. Small feathers from the victim were scattered in all directions for a distance of

FIELD NOTES (Cont'd.)

several feet. Evidently the hawk was just starting its meal when we happened along. The hawk flew to a nearby tree and no doubt returned to feed after we left. We were interested to note that the ducks paid no attention to the hawk although they must have been present when the Cooper's Hawk struck the unfortunate pheasant. M. B. SKAGGS

Jay Kills Warbler. On the morning of May 10, I was at the Lower Shaker Lake watching a goodly number of warblers feeding in the rain when I noticed a couple of Blue Jays nearby and saw one of them land on the ground about 40 feet from me. It seemed to be busy with something and at first I wondered whether, perhaps, a young one had fallen from the nest. Putting my binoculars on the Jay I saw that it was making a jobbing motion with its bill and I decided it must be feeding a fledgling.

The Jay soon flew to a tree about 20 feet farther away, however, and it was then I could see that a small bird was hanging from its bill. After it had perched on a low branch, the Jay acted like a Sparrow Hawk eating its prey. It tried to hold it with its feet while jobbing its bill into the bird. Several other Jays shortly began to move in, but before they arrived at the tree the first Jay dropped the bird on the ground. I ran to the spot before it could retrieve the victim because I wanted proof of what I had just seen. frightened the Jays away and quickly scanning the ground beneath the tree I discovered a female Myrtle Warbler which I picked up, finding it still warm. The right side of the neck was torn where the Blue Jay had attacked it with its strong bill, and the top of the head near the yellow crown patch was open as though the Jay had been picking at its brains just before it dropped it.

In about five minutes the same Blue Jay flew back into the tree and looked on the ground for its victim. Cocking its head to one side, the Jay seemed puzzled to find that its bird was gone. Although I had actually seen the Jay in the act of killing the Myrtle Warbler, I do not know where or how it captured it. I have never read anywhere about a Blue Jay killing another bird. (While the Blue Jay quite commonly takes eggs and nestlings, this is the first instance known to us where a fully adult bird was killed. The life history of this species contained in Bulletin 191 of the United States National Museum relates no similar incident of such behavior. - Ed.) SUE STORER

Squirrel Victimizes Hawk. On May 19, in the Upper Shaker Lakes woods I discovered the nest of a Broad-winged Hawk located at a height of about 65 feet in the crown of a black walnut tree. The nest, whose exterior was composed of small dead twigs and branches, was quite a compact mass, probably 12 to 14 inches high and seemingly as broad, at least on the upper surface. Although the female was incubating when I came upon the nest site, she soon flew off. But as long as I remained in the vicinity of the nest either she or her mate, both of whom were perched nearby though in different quarters of the woods, called intermittently, their piercing yet somewhat plaintive whistled phrase disrupting the midafternoon stillness.

FIELD NOTES (Cont'd.)

When I returned to the nest site at 9:15 a.m. the following day, neither bird was present. Unfortunately, I had forgotten my notebook and so I left to obtain it from my car parked some distance away. Upon resuming my observations at the nest about 25 minutes later, I was amazed to find that crouched on one of the main supporting branches about two feet from the rim of the nest was a red squirrel holding in its forepaws an egg of the Broad-winged Hawk. One of the hawks, presumably the female, soon appeared and alighted in a tall tree about 50 feet from the nesting tree and uttered the same sharp cry as on the previous day. She was quickly joined by four scolding Bronzed Grackles which perched within inches of her, so that to escape her tormentors she flew a short distance deeper into the woods but continued to cry out occasionally. Meanwhile the squirrel, like a figure carved in wood, had remained motionless, but with the departure of the hawk the squirrel turned and, holding the egg with but not in its mouth, scampered back across the nest and down the trunk of the walnut tree some 35 feet, coming to a halt in a guarded posture.

The hawk soon reappeared and actually alighted in the walnut tree about four or five feet above the nest. Almost immediately, however, she flew away a few hundred feet to the west where she perched in a tall tree, called just once or twice, and then fell silent. The squirrel, which all the while had rigidly maintained its position on the trunk of the tree, now moved out onto a horizontal limb in the bright sunlight and after a moment's pause began to dine upon the egg which it clutched at both ends, apparently sucking out the content through a hole in the center since the squirrel's jaws did not seem to move at all. Once again the hawk appeared over the nesting tree, did not perch, however, but flew on into the woods to the east. Although the squirrel proceeded to scamper about in the walnut tree, it made no attempt to return to the nest.

Finally, at 10:15 a.m., just 30 minutes after this episode began for me, I departed, conscience stricken that my intrusion had provided the opportunity for the squirrel's nest robbing. Before leaving I secured several large portions of the egg shell which the squirrel had dropped; these pieces, still wet inside, were a dull chalky gray-white flecked with deep chestnut brown and purple. Even while I gathered them, the hawk alighted in the walnut tree where the squirrel was lingering, but as I walked away she flew off disappearing in the deep woods beyond. At no time did I see or hear the male, assuming, of course, that the one bird which came to the nest was always the female.

Apparently the nesting of these Broad-winged Hawks was a complete failure because they were not present in the woods some ten days later.

DONALD L. NEWMAN