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# THE CLEVELAND BIRD CALENDAR

## Autumn Number

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## SUMMARY OF WEATHER CONDITIONS

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

- September - Cool and dry, this being the first month this year in which the precipitation was below normal. The 35° on the 21st was a new low for that date and also a new low for so early in the autumn.
- October - With less than one inch of rain, or about one-third of normal, and with the total hours of sunshine at 68% of the total possible hours, which was much above normal, this was a pleasant month. The first heavy frost occurred on the 11th.
- November- Temperatures were above normal during the first half and below normal during the last half of the month. Snow flurries were frequent in the last nine days, but only on the 22nd and 23rd was there a heavy fall, chiefly in the eastern part of the region.

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

## A Word of Appreciation

As, with this issue, we complete another year of publication of the BIRD CALENDAR, we wish to thank our contributors for their continued support. We also wish to praise those behind-the-scenes workers who have tabulated the many thousands of records out of which the CALENDAR is written. In particular, we are grateful to Vera Carrothers who assumed charge of this tedious but all-important task and whose dedicated devotion to it has made our own work so much easier; to her, then, our special thanks. The Editors.

## COMMENT ON THE SEASON

No spectacular flights of waterfowl were reported during the autumn, but our records indicate that there were at least two, possibly three, quite sizable migratory movements in November, each of them accompanied by a falling barometer and the arrival of a cold front. The first flight began on November 8, when throughout the day Canada Geese and many ducks were flying over Rocky River (Morton). This migration continued on the 9th, when a flock of 52 Whistling Swans appeared over Willoughby (Skaggs) and a flock of 80 Swans over Rocky River (Morton) - both bands headed south-east. On that same date Canada Geese, Mallards, Black Ducks, and some of the diving ducks were also on the move, but by the 10th the migration had dwindled as the barometer was rising.

Again, in the period November 16 through 18, there was an influx of waterfowl, particularly such diving ducks as the Goldeneye, Bufflehead, and Red-breasted Merganser. Finally, observations along the lakefront between the 22nd and the 25th revealed a marked increase in the numbers of most of the ducks, notably the Greater and Lesser Scaup, Canvasback, Goldeneye, Redhead, and Ruddy Duck. This was at the time when we had our first wintry weather, with an appreciable amount of snow.

November produced records of all three species of Scoters along the lake-front. A single White-winged was seen off Wagar Beach, Rocky River, quite regularly beginning on the 10th, while on the 12th a group of six was present (Morton). The American, in twos and threes, was observed on five dates during the middle of the month, and one of the rare Surf Scoter was seen "napping, diving, and flying" off Perkins Beach on the 11th (Klamm).

The marshy fill on the lakefront dump just north of the Airport, which had proved so attractive to the shorebirds during August, was frequented throughout September and to mid-October by a numerous company of Semipalmated Plovers, Killdeer, Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpipers (84 on September 22), and Semipalmated Sandpipers (75 on September 8). In addition there were such species as the following, which have hitherto been classed as either rare or uncommon in the Cleveland region: one Hudsonian Curlew on September 14 and 15; a flock of 19 Willet on September 1, the largest number reported in many decades (Ackermann); five White-rumped Sandpipers on September 15, and one on October 14 (Davies); the Dowitcher throughout September, with a high count of 14 on the 1st, the numbers then tapering off to the end of the month; the Stilt Sandpiper regularly in twos and threes to September 23, and then just one on October 6; four Western Sandpipers on September 1, and one on October 6 and 7.

## COMMENT ON THE SEASON (Cont'd.)

Among the passerine birds the only notable congregation reported was a flock of several thousand Purple Martins which remained in the Firestone Park area in south Akron from the last week in August to September 7. On that night the temperature dropped to 43°, and the following morning all of the birds were gone (Staiger). A migration of Blue Jays, or perhaps a shifting of population, was observed on November 2 and 3, on the grounds of Villa Angela Academy, which is located on the lakeshore near the eastern boundary of Cleveland. They were seen and heard everywhere, even on the adjoining residential streets, and it was not until about November 7, that the true winter population had become established there (Bartrug).

There was not a single report of the Red-breasted Nuthatch, which has been a quite uncommon migrant and winter visitor both in 1955 and 1956. The only other species which was appreciably less numerous was the Hermit Thrush, for which our records were almost entirely confined to the period from October 9th to the 21st; in fact we had just two other records of one bird each on September 30 and October 31. Normally this species is commonly recorded from about mid-September to the end of October.

Vireos and warblers were not observed in any truly large flocks, though the latter were "moderately numerous" in the vicinity of Willoughby on September 27 (Skaggs). In Aurora and Aurora Township warblers were reported as being "few and far between", and even a running water bird bath failed to attract many (Hamann). At Villa Angela on September 26 and 27, Tennessee Warblers were constantly passing through and were still fairly abundant on the 28th; amongst them on the 26th was one Orange-crowned Warbler (Bartrug). Again this autumn as in the autumn of 1955, the Palm Warbler was recorded remarkably few times, there being a total of only five records. For October there was just one record of this usually common migrant - 20 birds on the 7th, the largest number reported during the season.

Three species of sparrows seemed to arrive somewhat later than is customary. The Junco was first reported on September 29 (8) as compared with the first record of three on September 20, 1955, and an average first date of arrival of September 24. The Tree Sparrow, too, seemed to be about one week late; the first record was of five birds on October 27, as compared with a first record of seven on October 15, 1955, and an average date of arrival of October 22. Finally, the White-throated Sparrow was not reported in any considerable numbers until September 22 and 23, while last autumn this species was fairly numerous as early as September 11 and 12.

Although there were only five sight records for the Lincoln's Sparrow, each of a single bird, yet from September 15 to October 22, eleven individuals were trapped and banded in Willoughby (Skaggs). This is further evidence, if any were needed, that this species is a much more common migrant than our field observations would indicate.

To summarize: the autumn migration of waterfowl was quite regular, the ducks, geese, and swans appearing about on schedule, though, perhaps, not in as large numbers as in the autumn of 1955. With respect to the passerine birds, the migration was characterized by a fairly steady, unhurried flow and appeared to be lacking any sudden, intensive surges.

## COMMENT ON THE SEASON (Cont'd.)

In the BIRD CALENDAR year now ended, that is, from December 1, 1955 to November 30, 1956, our contributors observed a total of 250 species within the Cleveland region.

For those who are annotating their copy of Birds of Cleveland the following are new latest fall dates of occurrence:

Least Bittern (1) - October 14, Rocky River Reservation (Klamm)  
Dowitcher (1) - October 20, lakefront dump (Klamm)  
Crested Flycatcher (1) - October 10, Shaker Lakes (Newman)  
Wood Pewee (1) - October 14, Shaker Lakes (Deininger)  
Prothonotary Warbler (2) - September 23, Rocky River (Morton)  
Wilson's Warbler (1) - October 13, Rocky River Reservation (Klamm)  
Scarlet Tanager (1) - October 21, Cleveland Heights (Tramer)

### Addenda

Inadvertently omitted from the last number of the BIRD CALENDAR were these two new latest spring dates of occurrence reported by Owen Davies from Lakewood:

Olive-backed Thrush (1) - June 12  
Gray-checked Thrush (2) - June 5

### NOTEWORTHY RECORDS

Pomarine Jaeger - A fourth record of this maritime species in our region during the present century is that of a bird, in the dark phase, observed at Headlands State Park on November 4 (Davies). As it soared low overhead, the two extended central tail feathers which are twisted at right angles to the rest of the tail were clearly distinguished. The Jaeger soon ceased its soaring and headed out over Lake Erie but not before dipping low over a group of gulls that was resting on the beach.

Franklin's Gull - All of our previous records of this rare visitor have been of just one or two birds, but on October 7, a band of eight was studied at close range as they stood on the roadway bordering the lakefront dump in the forefront of a flock of grounded Herring, Ring-billed, and Bonaparte's Gulls (Klamm). A second record is that of two birds at White City on October 27 (Carrothers), where they were standing on a sandbar together with a number of other gulls.

Forster's Tern - Two were present on September 23, at the lakefront dump (Davies).

Short-eared Owl - The first bird to return to the lakefront dump, which was the particular haunt of a band of a dozen or more last winter and spring, was observed on September 13 (Harty). None was seen again until October 13, when eight were counted; thereafter the Owls were reported regularly, with a high count of ten on November 3.

## NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

Northern Horned Lark - A flock of 18 was feeding on a broad expanse of manure-strewn grassland at Edgewater Park on October 7 (Klamm). Clearly evident in good light and at close range were the bright yellow facial markings which separate this race from the common Prairie Horned Lark.

Sycamore Warbler - Among a small influx of warblers which lingered for about ten minutes in the Rocky River Reservation on September 10, were two birds of this species (Ackermann). They were feeding together in a grove of young trees and "were working around the small limbs in nuthatch fashion." This record is the first for the autumn months.

Summer Tanager - The birds which nested in an oak woods near Boston during the past summer, thereby establishing a new breeding record for the region, remained into September, an adult male being observed there on the 8th and two birds, either females or immatures, on the 29th (Knight). These records constitute the first report of this species in our region in the autumn.

From Neighboring Localities:

Barnacle Goose - A single adult of this species, which normally winters along the seacoast of northern Europe and the British Isles, appeared in mid-November on the Glendon C. Gressman farm in Sandusky County as reported by Allen J. Duvall, Research Biologist, and Rex C. Tice, Game Management Agent, of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The latter observed the Goose on November 14, when it was in the company of approximately 200 Canada Geese which were "grazing in a short-grass pasture located about 300 yards from the Gressman barn. The Barnacle was a busy feeder and was constantly on the move." It was seen periodically thereafter by a number of persons and was present on the farm as late as December 29. This is apparently only the second record of occurrence in the state, the previous record being of a bird taken at Sandusky Bay on November 5, 1925.

Long-tailed Jaeger - On October 20, a Mrs. Ruby Ferguson found this rarest of the Jaegers lying injured along the road near North Kingsville, about five miles east of Ashtabula (Savage). It was taken to a veterinarian who clipped the broken left wing. Though apparently weak, the Jaeger "soon revived on a diet of fish and dog food and seemed to be gaining strength and trying to flex its wings." Dr. Harry C. Oberholser was informed of this remarkable find and, accompanied by Dr. Owen Davies, went to Ashtabula to examine the bird and confirm its identity. Unfortunately, it died shortly before they arrived. He did examine it, however, pronouncing it to be an immature Long-tailed Jaeger, for the central tail feathers did not extend more than an inch beyond the rest of the tail. The skin was later prepared and sent to the Zoology Department of the University of Cincinnati to be added to its extensive collection. This is the first record in northern Ohio and possibly the first in the state, though there is a record of a bird collected at Buckeye Lake, near Columbus, on September 5, 1928, and identified as this species.

## FIELD NOTES

Sparrow Hawk Harasses a Short-eared Owl. On the afternoon of November 17, I watched a Sparrow Hawk harry one of the Short-eared Owls which are wintering on the dump north of the Lakefront Airport. The Hawk, calling excitedly, kept diving at the Owl which was

## FIELD NOTES (Cont'd.)

on the ground but concealed from my sight by an intervening stand of tall weeds. Upon reaching the bottom of its dive, the Hawk would zoom sharply upward to a height of perhaps 50 feet, hover a moment or two, and then would plummet back down to within a few feet of the ground. This performance was repeated eight or ten times until the Hawk finally flew away; but a short time later it returned and resumed its noisy harassment of the Owl, which meanwhile had moved on several hundred feet. Since the Owl was hidden from view on both occasions, I was unable to discover its reactions to the threatening tactics of the Sparrow Hawk. - DONALD L. NEWMAN

Fox Sparrow Visits Apartment House Feeding Station. The first real snowfall of the autumn season came during the night of November 22. The next morning everything was snow covered, and a cold wind was blowing as I cleared the window ledge of our apartment in mid-town Cleveland to put out seed for the English Sparrows who are my star boarders. They were not long in flocking to the food (there have been as many as 25 on the ledge at one time), and they brought with them a visitor - a Fox Sparrow, probably an immature judging from his subdued coloration. This newcomer seemed right at home even though he was eating on a window ledge two feet above the ground; several times with open bill it threatened its dining companions, even chasing one bird out of sight.

The Fox Sparrow seemed very hungry and returned a number of times during the day. On its last visit it remained until after 5:00 p.m., the English Sparrows having already gone to roost. But the next morning at seven it was back on the window ledge, standing in the snow which had fallen during the night. On the following day I did not see this transient guest until 4:30 p.m., though he remained until after five, not departing until it was almost dark. Early the next morning, November 26, he returned for the last time and disappeared soon afterward.

Watching this Sparrow feed on the window ledge, I noticed that it ate as though it were in its natural habitat. Occasionally it would scratch with its feet and then jump back just as if it were feeding in the leaves on the ground. It seemed to prefer feeding after the other birds had gone. Although it was quite bold the first day it appeared and allowed me to watch from within a foot of the window, on subsequent days it was more apprehensive and flew off when I drew near. - SUE STORER

Nesting of Saw-whet Owl. Not until late in the month of July 1956 did I learn that a pair of Saw-whet Owls was nesting in the Willoughby Cemetery, where they had found a nest site about 30 feet above the ground in the decayed limb of a soft maple tree. I was told that the nesting was begun late in June, and the five young were out of the nest on August 1. Toward the end of August residents in the neighborhood of the cemetery began to hear strange bird calls between 9:00 and 11:00 p.m., which were so weird and penetrating that some of the neighbors were actually kept awake. When L. P. Davis and I investigated the source of these sounds, we found it was the adult Saw-whet Owls who were the disturbers of the night. All of the Owls remained in the cemetery until September 25, after which none was either seen or heard. - F. N. SHANKLAND

(This is a particularly significant nesting record because it is the first authentic report of the breeding of this secretive little owl in the Cleveland region. - Ed.)

## FIELD NOTES (Cont'd.)

Starling's Response to Unseasonable Cool Weather. At the time of the fall equinox, unseasonable cool weather including pockets of severe frost prevailed in northeastern Ohio. At 7:30 a.m. on September 21, 1956, I observed a Starling warming itself at my neighbor's chimney. The bird perched at the top of the flue from which the exhaust fumes of a gas furnace were escaping. It repeatedly dipped its head far down into the chimney and into the stream of warm air. First one side of the bird and then the other was held next to the flue.

My thermometer registered 40°F. at the time. The Starling is a hardy bird and successfully withstands the low temperatures of our winter seasons. However, the sudden unseasonable coolness at that time apparently was felt as keenly by some birds as it was by human beings. - RALPH W. DEXTER, Kent State University

Pileated Woodpeckers at Suet Feeders. For some years we have kept suet feeders near the rear boundary line of our property located near Chardon. Because we had seen Pileated Woodpeckers close by, we considered early last winter the addition of another feeder in a small wood behind our place. We thought the greater seclusion there would add to our chances of attracting these birds.

But the Pileated Woodpeckers did not wait. We had one male visiting us almost daily beginning about midwinter, and on a few occasions we observed two males at once.

One day we watched from a window as one of these great birds landed at a feeder some 25 or 30 feet away. A perky red squirrel was already feeding. He retreated a foot or so in obvious surprise, faced about at the bird, and set up a great chattering. Then, in the manner of a caged canary responding to the teasing of his mistress' finger, the Woodpecker spread his wings and quivered them until the squirrel retreated. With the full backlight of a late afternoon sun, it was a tableau worthy of an Audubon. -

EDITH and GORDON SPARE

### SHOREBIRD BANDING AT THE "DUMP"

by  
Vera Carrothers

For many weeks during the summer of 1956, Stephen Harty had talked about acquiring a mysterious object known as a "mist" net, with which he intended to band shorebirds. Finally, with time running out and his patience worn to razorblade thinness, this strange contrivance arrived and was put into use on the evening of August 28, on the sodden surface of the dump just north of the Lakefront Airport in downtown Cleveland. On the following evening as well as on five or six nights thereafter I assisted Stephen, who also worked alone on several nights until mid-September when he and his family moved to Philadelphia.

The net, mounted like a volley ball net, was stretched on two poles across one of the shallow, muddy channels along which the shorebirds were accustomed to feed. Tied to the poles were three taut, heavy strings - top, bottom, and center. The net itself, however, bore no resemblance to a volley ball net, for it was made of a gossamer-like

## SHOREBIRD BANDING (Cont'd.)

substance, seemingly either hair or black nylon (hence the name "mist" net), and was loose, or gathered, on the three heavy, transverse cords. Because of the size of the mesh, which was 1-1/4 inches square, it was also called a "thrush" net. Since the use of this net is not open to every bird bander, Stephen had had to obtain a special license which was entered on his banding permit.

Most of the shorebirds were caught at sunset or a short while later. Earlier in the evening they seemed to detect the net just as they got to it, and if they were flying fairly high, they could swoop up to avoid it. This was especially true of the larger birds - Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpipers, and Dowitchers. The smaller birds (more than 50% of all the birds banded were Semipalmated Sandpipers) flew lower and either did not see the net or were too low to avoid it; thus they were often caught while it was still light.

As the bird hit the net, its weight against the loose, clinging mesh formed a sort of pocket which enveloped it. We learned to stand quite near, hidden somewhat if it were still light, in order to run out and grab the bird before it struggled and became entangled in the mesh. If three birds were captured at once, I would hold one in each hand while Stephen released the third. Those were moments of torture for me because immediately hordes of bloodthirsty mosquitoes would descend upon my hands and I was powerless to fight them off. On windy nights there were no mosquitoes, but we did not get many birds either because the wind made the net taut so that the birds bounced right out. On more favorable nights, however, the birds often were netted so fast there was not time to band them. Then they were "stored" in several cardboard boxes until after the net was taken down. At times the banding took as long as one hour.

Identification in the hands sometimes based on entirely different characteristics from the familiar field marks we seek when we observe a bird through binoculars. In the case of the Least Sandpiper, for example, we carefully examined under our flashlights the legs of our first captive in the belief that the color would be the conclusive identifying character. But we quickly found that the artificial light gave us no appreciation of color values. Then someone remembered the meaning of "semipalmated". Thereafter it took only a second to note the lack of webbing between the tiny toes of the Least Sandpiper, which distinguished it from the Semipalmated Sandpiper with its partially webbed toes.

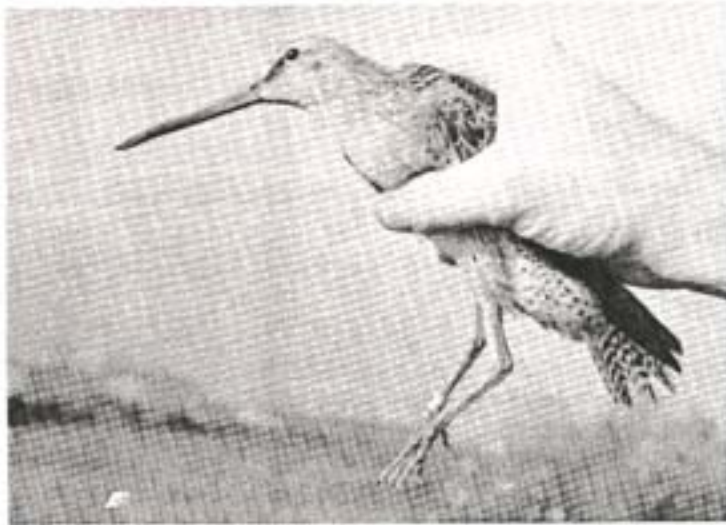
On August 29, just as it was getting quite dark, we saw a Willet. The next night Stephen had the good luck to capture it in the net. After he had banded it, he and William Klamm took a great many pictures of this rare visitor. Because the bird was handled by so many people and had so many flash bulbs set off in its face, I thought if it survived at all it would go for, far away from the dump. Yet the next night this Willet - serene and unruffled, though now wearing its shining bracelet - was standing just where we had first seen it two nights before.



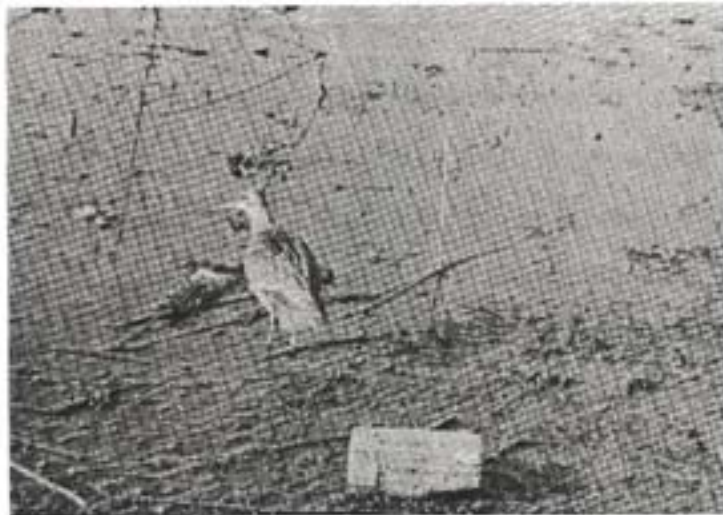
## SHOREBIRD BANDING (Cont'd.)

One evening when William and Nancy Klamm, Sue Storer, Stephen, and I were all gathered at the banding site on the dump, we found that by standing a newly-banded bird on our hand facing into a strong wind and with all of our flashlights focused upon it, the bird would stand for a minute or more before flying away. (Like children, we took turns releasing the birds.) It was an unforgettable experience to have a wild bird stand free on your hand while you studied the exquisite beauty of its form and feathers; the big ones - Dowitchers, Yellowlegs, and Pectoral Sandpipers - were of course the most thrilling to handle and hold.

In the nine nights he had the mist net set up at the lakefront dump, Stephen banded 130 birds, as follows: 7 Semipalmated Plovers; 3 Killdeer; 11 Lesser Yellowlegs; 11 Pectoral Sandpipers; 3 Least Sandpipers; 15 Dowitchers; 1 Western Willet; 79 Semipalmated Sandpipers.



Dowitcher wearing its "shining bracelet" bearing number 522-57631.



The same Dowitcher eyes the photographer apprehensively.

Photographs taken by Stephen Harty on August 29, 1956, on the dump north of the Lakefront Airport in downtown Cleveland.