THE MIGRANT

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DEVOTED TO TENNESSEE BIRDS

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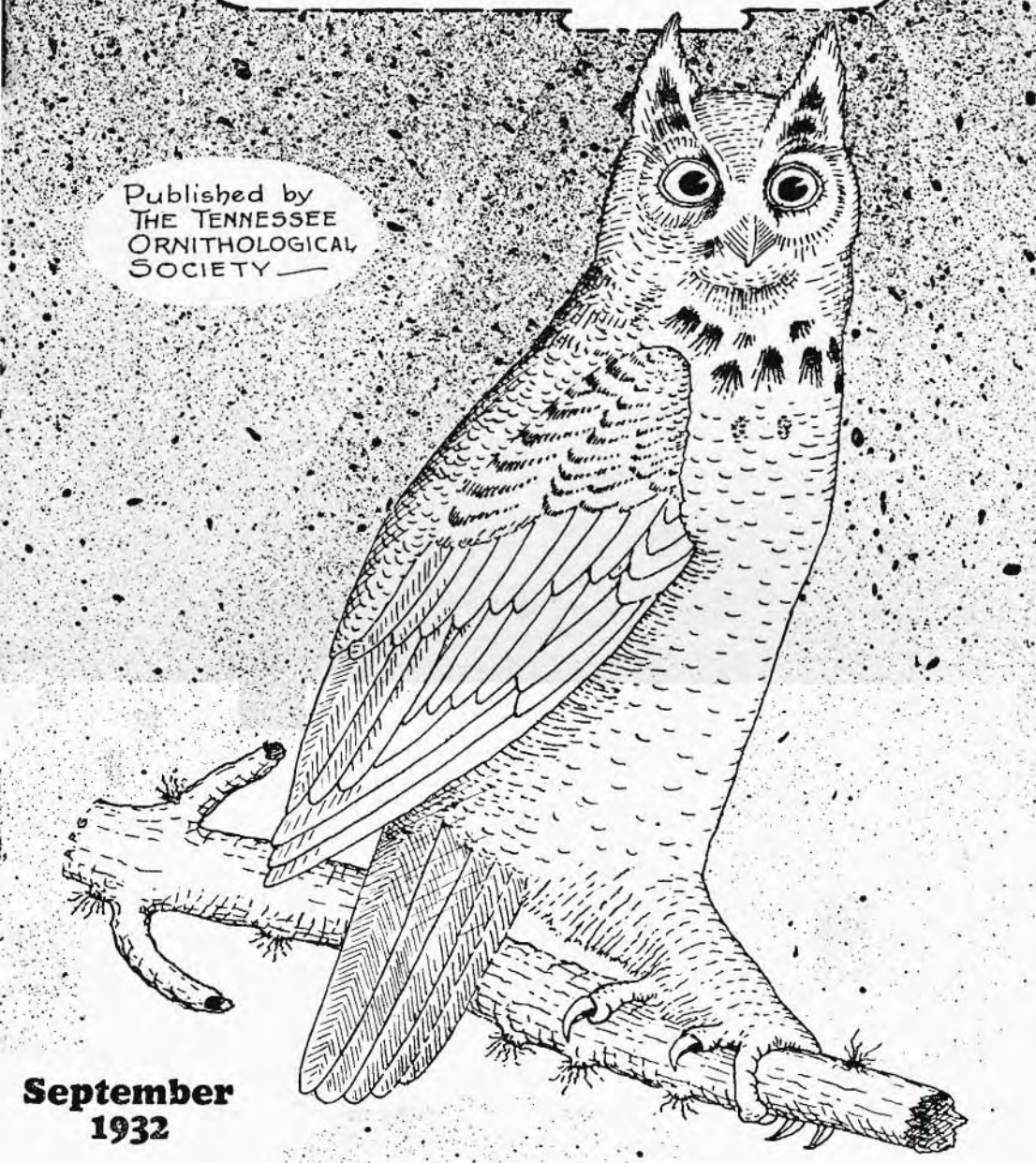

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THE MIGRANT

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USEFUL HINTS FOR FIELD WORK

By GEORGE R. MAYFIELD

The morning hour is the best time of day to study birds. At this time they are most active in getting food and most lively in song. A quick eye, a keen ear, a deal of patience and a love of nature make up the best equipment for successful field work. In addition to these personal requisites one should have a pair of field glasses, 8-power preferred, for the study of those species which are a bit shy or else feed in the tops of trees.

Color is the best and surest means of identification. If a bird is black, or blue, or red, he can be run down very quickly in Reed's Pocket Guide or Blanchan's Bird Neighbors. If he is brown or mottled the search is more difficult. If a small brown bird with a chestnut crown, look for the Chipping Sparrow; if larger, with white lines over the head and white on the throat, look for the Whitethroat. If brown, with white outer tail feathers, look for the Vesper Sparrow; if small and brown with a pink bill, see if it is a Field Sparrow. The vireos are olive and green with habits that make them somewhat difficult to study closely. But the two white wing bars usually show the White-eyed Vireo plainly to the amateur; the light line over the eye is a good way to spot the Red-eyed Vireo. In short, the more expert one becomes, the quicker he is in selecting that one feature which distinguishes one species from another. It may be a mark ever so small, a color ever so faint, or some characteristic movement, but he learns to look first for this one point and the decision is made. Once mastered, this glance will reveal more than long inspection by an untrained worker.

Next to color, note the exact size of the bird. A large brown bird is not likely to be one of the sparrows and a small brown one is not one of the thrushes. Practice soon enables one to tell to an inch how long a bird is, and this helps to eliminate many of the species similarly marked. Among the warblers, which are so nearly the same length and build, one must have to resort to colors and markings more than any other feature. The place where a bird is feeding usually reveals to an expert the probable identity of a bird. The tops and outer limbs of trees are the feeding grounds for the orioles, vireos and warblers. The trunk and the limbs of trees delight the heart of the Creeper, the Woodpecker and the Nuthatch; the Mocker, the Thrasher, the Catbird and the Sparrow prefer the bushes and the thickets for their nests and their feeding grounds; in the meadows and the fields are the Larks, the Bobolinks, the Bluebirds, the Doves and many of the sparrows, while many species are found only in the deep woods away from the eyes of men.

The flight of birds is also a good criterion. Some fly in almost a straight line, such as the Crow, the Grackle, the Oriole and the Vultures. The up and down motion of the Woodpecker is a family failing and is almost a sure sign of recognition. Some flap their wings a great deal in flight, such as the Jay, the Grackle, the sparrows and the Mocker. Some birds are high flyers, like the Red-tailed Hawk, the water birds and most birds on a long migration; still other birds skim along the ground, rarely getting but a few feet

above terra firma. The Cedar Waxwings fly around in compact flocks, with movements almost as perfect as the evolutions of a West Point cadet corps; the Creeper, the woodpeckers and other species prefer to be alone or else find that two make up company and the rest are undesirable citizens. Even the walk of birds is evidence enough to an expert in detecting the species. The stately step of the Grackle, the swift marathon rush of the Quail, the rapid two-step of the sparrows and the nervous walk of the Kildeer are just as characteristic as their coloring.

The quickest of all means of identification is the song of birds, but it takes longest to get this down to accurate results. To the practiced ear, however, the note of a bird becomes as much a test as the coloring of the bird. One increases his efficiency many times by this means, as he may detect the presence of a new bird or a rare bird by a different note. He can thus cover a much larger territory by using both eye and ear. But it must not be forgotten that it requires infinite patience to master the fifty-seven different varieties of the Robin's song, the many calls of the Wren, and the varied notes of the sparrows.

Let the student begin with a few common species and learn to recognize them instantly; add to these one by one the new species, taking care in each case to master the colors, the markings and the habits of the bird, so that he can identify the bird at once. When he has mastered twenty species in this way he is likely to become an enthusiastic student of bird life.

And lastly, by all means keep a notebook, one that you can carry in your pocket afield as well as kept readily accessible at home. In this book write down the birds as you find them, interesting things you have observed, data on nests you examine, etc., and don't forget to include the dates, for these will make your notes useful to others, as well as to yourself.

Nashville, Tenn., April, 1920.

A SUMMER VISITOR

"DRIPPING ROCK" NOTES

One morning just before dawn while the light was so meager that moving objects could scarcely be seen, something in apparent distress was noticed in the deepest part of the fish pond. A rush for a dip net, that should have been within reach, but never is when needed most, gave the thing time to reach shore safely. While moving slowly toward it in the shadow of the shrubbery, the wet creature was seen to run its bill through its feathers, flutter its wings, stretch its neck, again flutter its wings and deliberately return to the water. It swam or rather paddled out two feet from the edge of the pool into the deepest part, where the water is three feet deep, fluttering its wings with the effort and slight distress that a small boy manifests when he first learns to swim, dog fashion. Once more it swam to shore, preened its feathers, fluttered, showered drops of water on the nearby ferns, stretched its neck as though exercising for high C, rested a moment, then back again to the water with its wings flapping water in a thick spray that wet every part of the body except the head. The head was held high in a strained position as though afraid a single drop of water would touch it. There was nothing but awkwardness in the movements of the bird; in fact, it acted as though doing something distasteful and unusual. After the third splashing it remained quietly at the side of the pool, where the shadows of an overhanging shale cliff made it impossible to see anything but a long down curved bill and some curious light and dark markings that were still too

wet to define. Without hurry it moved a few steps toward a Royal fern, where the ground is a little moist at all times. Here it stopped, turned its head slightly upward, then quickly jabbed its long bill in the wet ground for whatever it was that attracted it. This was repeated a dozen times, always within an inch or so of the last boring. By this time the light was strong enough and the feathers fluffy and dry enough so that the beautiful markings left no doubt that a Woodcock had come to visit us.

For three months this aristocrat lived with us. Lived in a closely built section of Nashville, in a city lot of less than half an acre, within a stone's throw of a street car line. For the Woodcock it was three months of night-feasts, before-dawn baths and loneliness. For me it was three months of genuine pleasure—pleasure, because being hostess to a true aristocrat is a joy not often brought to me. No bird on the ground ever quite reaches the poise and noble bearing of the Woodcock. The slow dignity of its movements when it skirted the shrubbery, moving from one moist spot to another, was exactly like the slow gracefulness of a bride in a middle aisle. The gentle pressure or pat of its foot as it tested the resistance of the damp ground before trusting its full weight to it, or the repressed eagerness with which it thrust its long bill was more like the slow motion movies than a hungry bird in search of food. Its actions were never hurried, not even when it took flight at the unexpected approach of a visitor. Usually the first knowledge a visitor had of its presence was the whistling of the short primaries as they sounded overhead. It rose gracefully and easily from the dense undergrowth, taking off from the ground without effort and with no apparent haste, swinging around to alight within the boundaries of the hedge-fenced garden, always going from back to front, from front to side, and again returning to the back underbrush when the need arose.

It became accustomed to me and allowed me, after a few weeks, to work within a few feet of it. Many times it closed its eyes and sank its head, evidently in sleep, yet pruning and weeding went on within arm's reach of it. After two months of daily companionship it could be picked up with both hands forming a basket-like nest, the wings examined and the tail spread, then, when set again on the ground, it would start boring immediately, paying no further attention to us. It could be carried from one place in the garden to another that had been freshly wet for it, and it never gave any manifestation of fear as long as I moved slowly and nervelessly. A quick motion or the chattering of guests brought the whistling wings into immediate play or sent it unhurriedly into the undergrowth, always moving its head and body around so that the offender was kept in full view.

Through June, July and August this friendship grew. Then, one morning during the last week in August, 1931, it made its last round of the garden, taking with it band No. A429378. Now that it is gone, memories of its dignity and gentleness are so great that it is hard not to believe that the curious bathing antics were intentionally set for an hour when no picture and few eyes could ever bear witness to its strange performance.

Nashville, Tenn., June, 1932.

FALL "MIGRANTS:" We regret to announce that two of our officers are leaving Tennessee and are therefore handing in their resignations. Miss Vera Kearby, our efficient Secretary, and a most loyal member for some years, is returning to Texas, her native State. Mr. Compton Crook, who has for several years served us as Treasurer, is located in Kentucky at present. The Society is much indebted to these offices for their work in its behalf, and we shall miss their good company on field days and at meetings.

HUMMINGBIRDS

By H. S. VAUGHN

The smallest of all the feathered tribe is the Hummingbird, which derives its name from the sound made by its wings while in flight. There are some 600 species and subspecies of this bird, whose habitat is America and its adjoining islands. Only 17 varieties are found in North America, and but one of these ranges east of the Mississippi River, this being our Ruby-throated, with which we are all familiar. This bird has possibly the longest range of any of its kind, extending, as it does, from Canada to Central Mexico. The largest number of Hummers are to be found about the Tropic of Capricorn, where they fairly swarm, growing fewer as you go north or south from this point.

The length of these birds varies from 1¼ to 8½ inches from tip of tail to tip of bill. The thickness of their bodies at the sternum bone is large in proportion to other birds, owing to the need for attachment of wing muscles.

The nest of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird will average about one inch in width and one inch deep. It is a work of art, being composed of plant fiber, thistle down, moss, spider web and other soft materials covered with tree lichen glued on with their saliva. This hardens, thereby giving some solidity to the structure. The nest is usually placed on a horizontal limb of a tree varying from seven to twenty-five feet from the ground, looking more like a knot on the tree than a nest. They lay but two eggs and these are white with all species. There is a single exception to this, that the Hermit Hummer, which lays but one egg. When the eggs are deposited in the nest and the female begins the process of incubation, the male bird leaves home and remains away for the 10 or 12 days of incubating. It is thought the bright plumage of the male bird might attract some enemy to the nest and cause trouble, therefore he is ordered away from home.

When the young are hatched, the mother bird will sit on the side of the nest in the heat of the day, spreading wings and tail to shade them from the sun. Nowhere in bird life do we find a more solicitous parent than the female Hummingbird. The young of this species do not fall from the nest as do the young of some other birds. Since they are to remain on the wing much of the time when they leave the nest, it behooves them to be sure they are prepared, so they set their claws in the rim of the nest and each day try out their wings. After some days of this preparation they feel they are able to maintain themselves on their wings, and they then take flight. Last June it was the writer's good fortune to witness this exercise as he took motion pictures of a nest from the top of a ladder. The young were fed regularly by their parents at the time and at intervals they tried out their wings as above described. The following day the nest was found to be empty.

Their food is the nectar from flowers, as supposed, but this comprises only about one-third of their diet. The balance is made up of small bugs which they find also in the flowers, as well as the insects they catch from the air. The young are fed by the process of regurgitation. The mother takes the food into her crop, predigests it, then pumps it into the mouth of the young.

The Hummer is the only bird that can fly both forward and backward equally well. Most of us have noted how they go into a flower and then back out again, with apparently the same beat of the wing. They, with the Chimney Swifts, are the only species that never alight on the ground. Their legs are so short that they could make no progress if they did.

It would hardly be just to leave this subject without some mention of the plumage of these wonderful birds. From the earliest times the Indians appreciated their feathers, in that his bride was thought not to be properly prepared for her wedding unless she had some of the feathers of the Hummer about her dress. No other group of birds can compare in beauty and variety of the plumage to that of this family. There is hardly a precious stone—ruby, amethyst, sapphire, emerald or topaz—the name of which may not fitly, and without exaggeration, be employed in describing the beauty of their plumage.

Nashville, Tenn., September, 1932.

A TRIP TO MUD LAKE, SEPT. 18, 1932

By MRS. BEN B. COFFEY, JR.

Having seen a large number of American Egrets and Little Blue Herons, as well as one Wood Ibis, at Mud Lake on September 5th, Mr. Coffey drove there on Sunday, Sept. 18, to show Miss Alice Smith and me the large flocks of these two "white cranes." Mud Lake is 13 miles southwest of Memphis and is located in both Mississippi and Tennessee, with Arkansas about three miles westward. The north shore, where most of the birds were concentrated, is in Tennessee.

As we climbed on top of the levee we saw a large hawk-like bird take flight from a nearby cypress. A turn toward the light and a white tail was seen. A Bald Eagle? A better view through the binoculars and the white head as well as white tail was seen, and Miss Smith and I added a new species to our life list. "Old Baldy" was seen twice again that day, soaring directly over us on one occasion. It evidently was a male, judging by its relatively small size.

While the Eagle was still circling overhead, Mr. Coffey called our attention to a Wood Ibis perched in a cypress between the levee and the lake. Number two for our life list! With the lake in the background, the picture seemed to be a typical one of this American Wood-stork in its summer home along the Gulf coast. It soon took flight and we were able to note the long outstretched head and neck and the dark outer flight feathers contrasting with the remaining white. We saw no other Wood Ibises, although we had high hopes of doing so. The Wood Ibis moves northward from its breeding grounds in July or August, and should be fairly common locally along the Mississippi until October. A local resident told us he had seen flocks of 50 to 75 of these "Gourd-heads" this season.

Mud Lake seemed to be a very shallow and muddy pond with a large number of white waders on the far shore and back among the willows. We made our way through the thickets to the muddy border in order to make a census of these birds and to look for more Wood Ibises. Why here were three of the latter, on black and white wings, coming down over the lake! No, we were mistaken. These birds were slightly larger and carried their heads drawn in—they must be White Pelicans! And in the glasses we made out the large yellow pouch-like bills, famous in song and story. Number three! A flock of seven others arrived and in watching the Pelicans swim about among the Herons it was discovered that many of the original birds there were Pelicans. In all there were 64 of them. The herons consisted of 180 American Egrets, 19 Great Blue (or Ward's) Herons, 15 adult Little Blue Herons and 256 of the all-white or immature Little Blue Herons.

In contrast with the herons which waded about and stalked their food,

a few preceding or keeping abreast of the Pelicans, the latter swam along, plunging their cavernous bills in and out of the water with apparently good results. They moved slowly along, parallel to the shore, in an irregular column, two and three abreast, with each bird busily securing its share of the available fish. There were three main fishing groups, the largest numbering 27. A few Pelicans waded out on the shore and, at rest on land, presented the usual grotesque appearance that we associate with them from pictures or from trips to the zoo.

It was in the air, however, that these birds, the largest of all our North American species, really thrilled us. Becoming alarmed, they rose on their powerful black and white wings and in two flocks seemed to hover over the lake, undecided as to whether to return or leave. In fact, their flight was such that we did not realize they were leaving until conscious of their diminishing appearance. The birds of each flock, well bunched, seemed to slowly circle to the right and then to the left, back and forth all together, appearing at first to be a flock of all-white birds, beautiful in the bright sunlight, and then, as all tilted their bodies slightly, the dark outer flight feathers showed on each, outlining and emphasizing the remaining white. When the two flocks first came together, one-half would be all-white and the other black and white, then each half would change. The effect was beautiful; it might be compared to some of the lighting effects magnificently staged by some master showman. As we watched, they slowly faded into the distance.

White Pelicans winter from Florida and the Gulf Coast to Panama. They breed in Yellowstone National Park, near Klamath, Oregon, and at several lakes of southwestern Canada. During migration they may sometimes be seen east of the Mississippi (north of Florida), and seem to be not uncommon in the fall in this part of the Mississippi valley proper.

Memphis, Sept., 1932.

THE ROUND TABLE

THE SEASON AT MEMPHIS: In the June *Migrant* I mentioned that Prairie Horned Larks were apparently nesting here. Patience was rewarded on May 29, when we found their young along the roadside at the Municipal Airport. Two were first seen, then six others just beyond these. All were in juvenile plumage. A few minutes later an adult pair were seen over in the field itself. Inasmuch as up to five pairs of these larks have been recorded here since March 6, indications are that several pairs nested on this field, access to which was unfortunately barred to pedestrians. On May 21, Earl Henry, dental student here from Knoxville, and I added a new species to our life lists when we saw two Mississippi Kites in the Darwin-Ensley bottoms southwest of Memphis. On the 29th, Mrs. Coffey and I returned there and saw five. On June 18 I saw five on President's Island, at a point about four miles northeast of the point of original discovery. Two of these flew over us and alighted in a bare tree, affording good close-up views. On August 7, Mrs. Coffey and I again drove through the bottoms and saw four Kites and a Broad-winged Hawk perched in the open; even after approaching to a point underneath the Kites we could only make one of them take to the air. None were seen on September 5 or 18; by the latter date they had probably gone South. On May 21, Henry and I saw an Osprey over Horn Lake at Lakeview, Miss. This is my first personal record for the Memphis area. At the Lakeview, Miss., barrow pit, a King Rail's nest was found on May 7 with 3 eggs, 4 eggs on the 8th, and 9 eggs on the 15th. No change through June

1, the last visit before the 4th, when 2 eggs remained and 3 to 4 chicks were seen, two being caught and photographed. No Sora were seen on this last trip. White-rumped Sandpipers; five noted on May 21 and one on May 29. Other shore birds were present through the last visit, June 4. At this time six female Lesser Scaups were still lingering here. A Baldpate was seen on May 21. On May 30 the nesting colony of Pied-billed Grebes was checked for the last time. One adult was in charge of ten immature Grebes; apparently all that survived from about a dozen nests averaging 8 to 10 eggs each. Three young were over 3 weeks old, two from 2 to 3 weeks old, and five were 10 or more days old. When I returned here in August only a few inches of water remained in the formerly deeper portions and weeds several feet high were growing where the floating nests of the Grebes had been. About 60 American Egrets and immature Little Blue Herons were seen, but they left this spot within two weeks, as only a small and deep pit adjacent to the highway failed to dry up completely. Here, on August 7, we saw a few Least Tern feeding immature birds, while on the 14th, the only ones seen were five immature Terns fishing for themselves in the roadside pit. For more recent waterbird observations, see Mrs. Coffey's article on page 35. This appears to be a popular highway for swallows migrating southward, as large numbers are seen in the air or on wires. They are chiefly Rough-winged, but there are also Bank, some Tree, and a few Barn. One Cliff Swallow was noted. The Magnolia Warbler appears to be the most common transient of this family.—Ben B. Coffey, Memphis.

LARK SPARROW AT NASHVILLE: This bird, on account of its very local distribution here, has all but eluded the efforts of local bird students to record it as a breeding species. We have a number of early August records, but these have been considered as transient birds. On July 4, 1932, Messrs. G. R. Mayfield, Vernon Sharp and myself were so fortunate as to find two family groups of these birds on the Stewart's Ferry Pike, twelve and twenty-two miles east of Nashville, respectively. There were four birds in the first lot, mostly young, but at least one parent which was still bringing food to them. They made headquarters in the tops of medium-sized trees along a creek in an open meadow, and allowed us to closely observe them. I found an empty nest close by, built in the short crab-grass, and resembling that of a Dickcissel. These young had been out of the nest at least ten days. At the further location, a mile west of Gladeville, a group of six flew from old apple trees at the side of the road and into an adjacent meadow, where they permitted close approach. My first summer record of this species about Nashville was made on May 16, 1918, on the Lebanon road, a few miles north of the first mentioned location. Two birds were observed, three miles apart, dusting themselves in the road. My next record was on June 21, 1919, when a parent bird was seen feeding a young one as it sat on a telephone wire over pastured land. This was near the Masonic Home, along the L. & N. R. R., five miles north of Nashville. They could not be found there the following year. On July 14, 1916, Mayfield collected a specimen near Hendersonville, fourteen miles northeast of Nashville. It was one of several which he had flushed from a dusty road, and he believes they had nested nearby. This species is one of the largest and handsomest of the Sparrow family; it is trimly built, has a relatively small head and assists in its identification by spreading its tail so that the white margins may be seen.—A. F. Ganier, Nashville.

REELFOOT LAKE: The new Biological Station at Walnut Log is now equipped and ready for the use of naturalists and nature students who may wish to visit the lake. Good hotel accommodations may be had at the Walnut Log Hotel nearby, and it is hoped that our members will visit the Station frequently. It is sponsored by the Tennessee Academy of Science.

FALL MIGRATION RECORD FOR THE GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER: On the afternoon of September 8, 1932, while following a flock of migrant warblers, my attention was attracted to a fast-feeding warbler which swung head downward on the terminal twigs like a Chickadee. My suspicions were abundantly confirmed on closer examination, for I had seen this warbler several times in fall migration near Atlanta, Ga. It was a male Golden-wing, *Vermivora chrysoptera*, in splendid plumage, and I followed this rare visitor full fifteen minutes to study his habits and markings.

The first record made of this species in the vicinity of Nashville was by Mr. J. A. Robbins and myself in Centennial Park April 26, 1922. His song and actions left a thrill in our minds. The second record was made by a group of the T. O. S. in Shelby Park, May 5, 1929. Mr. Harry Monk and Mr. Compton Crook made a third record in Westmeade, May 4, 1930. My cards for September, 1931, show a record for the Golden-wing, but the glimpse was so hasty that I hesitate to enter this record as authentic. This, then, is the fourth unquestioned record of this species near Nashville. The writer found a pair of Golden-wings feeding young just out of the nest at Mayland, Camp Nakanawa, July 20, 1924.—G. R. Mayfield, Nashville.

COWBIRDS BREEDING IN EAST TENNESSEE: This species has been regarded by some as one not to be looked for in this region during the breeding season, therefore the three following notes from observers in that area will be of interest. H. P. Ijams, at Knoxville, found a nest of the Red-eyed Vireo on June 12, 1932, containing one egg of that species and one of the Cowbird. Shortly before, he found a young Cowbird being fed by a Kentucky Warbler in its nest along with young of the rightful owners. Of more than twenty nests examined by himself and thirty-five examined by L. A. Hofferbert, these were the only Cowbird eggs found. He does not recall finding them in previous years. Robert B. Lyle of Johnson City, on April 17th, found a nest with three eggs of the Cardinal and which also contained two of the Cowbird. These were the first eggs he had ever found of the Cowbird in that vicinity. At Bristol, F. M. Jones writes: "The Cowbird is very rare in this section, and only occasionally is one seen." The presence of Cowbirds in summer is frequently detected only by finding their eggs in other birds' nests. Mr. Jones has examined hundreds of nests and is in a position to know. Brimley and Pearson, in their "Birds of North Carolina," 1919, were unable to record it as a breeding species in that State.

BIRD BANDING: Mrs. Arch Cochran's work in bird banding received a two-column writeup in the Nashville Banner of Sept. 4th, together with a number of photos reproduced in the rotogravure section. At her home, "Dripping Rock Bird Sanctuary," she has of late been using clap nets, this type of trap having proved most effective and least harmful to the birds captured. To date she and her co-operators have banded more than 1,500 birds. Last spring she was justifiably thrilled at having trapped a Robin originally banded at New Hartford, Conn. The bird was captured on March 23 and trapped again on April 10. She is hoping for its return.

OUR NEW OFFICERS: Ben B. Coffey, Memphis, President; Harry P. Ijams, Knoxville, Vice-President for East Tennessee; Wayland J. Hayes, Nashville, Vice-President for Middle Tennessee; Albert F. Ganier, Curator, Nashville; Mrs. F. C. Laskey, Graybar Lane, Nashville, Secretary, and George B. Woodring, Nashville, Treasurer and Editor. Lend them your cooperation.

The *Migrant* is sent to all members not in arrears for dues. Active membership is one dollar a year; associate membership is fifty cents. Subscription to non-members is fifty cents. All articles and correspondence should be addressed to the Editor-Treasurer, George B. Woodring, E. Woodmont Boulevard, Nashville, Tenn. Dues should be sent to the Treasurer.