

— M A R Y L A N D —
— B I R D L I F E —

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T H E S E A S O N

January and February, 1948

January and the first half of February brought unseasonably cold temperatures together with half again the usual snowfall. More significant than the total snowfall, however, was the unusually long period that the ground was completely covered, making it difficult for some of the less hardy permanent resident species such as the Carolina wren and the mockingbird to find sufficient food. A brief warm period from February 17 to 20 brought the first general movement of migrants, but a heavy, wet snow on the 22nd put an abrupt stop to the migration. Warm weather returned for the last four days of the month, enticing many wintering birds into song, and starting the mass movement of ducks and blackbirds.

Hérons, Ducks. Steele Webster reports that 5 American egrets remained at Blackwater Refuge until the heavy snows of mid-January, but they were not seen subsequently. The heavy freeze which occurred in late December caused a conspicuous reduction in wintering waterfowl, but did not prevent the blue-winged teal and shoveller from remaining north of their regular winter range; 5 blue-wings, 25 shovelers, and 30 gadwalls were among an interesting list of waterfowl observed on Feb. 21 at Elliott Is. by the District Audubon Society.

Hawks. The first hawk flight at Patuxent Refuge was observed on Feb. 28 by Ralph Hosley, John Willoughby and C. S. Robbins. Twelve red-tailed hawks, 2 sharp-skins, 1 Cooper's, 1 bald eagle, and 1 marsh hawk passed overhead in a single hour. The only rough-legged hawks reported were single birds at Kent Island and Port Tobacco.

Rails, Shorebirds, Terns. Two king rails heard calling at Port Tobacco on Feb. 28 by Robbins and the Audubon Society were doubtless wintering birds. Another winter record of the black-bellied plover was obtained by R. E. Stewart, who saw one at Ocean City on Jan. 10 along with 35 red-backed sandpipers. Two winter records of the Wilson's snipe from the Western Shore are of particular interest in such a severe winter: 4 were reported by Seth Low from his home at Unity about Jan. 19, and on Feb. 2, a single bird was flushed at Patuxent Refuge by Stewart. The latter observer found 7 Forster's terns at Ocean City on Jan. 10, but they were not seen later in the winter.

Woodpeckers, Flycatchers. Hervey Brackbill reported up to 2 flickers at Hillsdale Park, Baltimore, in mid-winter--very unusual for this urban area. Red-bellied woodpeckers wintered at Towson (Mrs. Alan Beerbower) and Baltimore (Millard Merz, Jr.) within a few miles of the limit of their breeding range. Brackbill found 3 red-headed woodpeckers at Hillsdale Park in February, one color-banded adult completing 10 months of continuous residence on the 29th. Haven Kolb found hairy woodpeckers courting on Feb. 28 at Towson, and on Feb. 9 Brackbill last saw a color-banded downy woodpecker which had been frequenting his feeding station regularly since he banded it on Oct. 5. Phoebees are ordinarily very rare in winter except on the Eastern Shore, but single birds were seen near Halethorpe on Jan. 3 (R. M. Bowen) and at Port Tobacco on Feb. 28 (Audubon Soc.)

Crows, Wrens, Thrasher. Brackbill observed the first large northward flight of crows over Hillsdale Park on Feb. 18, when 325 were counted between 6:44 and 7:10 a.m. flying silently at an altitude of about 200 feet; the flight was still going on at the time he had to stop counting. The Carolina wren, which had been steadily increasing for the past few years, was reported by several observers to be much less common after the severe weather of January and February. Several brown thrashers braved the winter on the Western Shore; 1 was seen near Halethorpe on Jan. 4 by Bowen and Irving Hampe, 1 at Mrs. Chester Snow's feeding station at Chevy Chase on Jan. 28 and Feb. 8, and 1 at Port Tobacco on Feb. 28 (Audubon Society).

Thrushes, Blackbirds. The general arrival of robins in the Baltimore-Washington area took place on Feb. 28. Robert Mitchell first heard the bluebird singing at Beltsville on Feb. 18 and at the Patuxent Refuge on the following day. Small groups of rusty blackbirds wintered at College Park (M. B. Meanley, W. H. Ball) and Patuxent Refuge (Stewart), and 10 were seen near Halethorpe on Feb. 1 by Hampe and Bowen; mid-winter records north of Washington are few.

Finches and Sparrows. Purple finches remained scarce and very local throughout the period, and siskins were completely absent. Towhees wintered sparingly in southern Maryland as usual, and up to 4 visited Mrs. Beerbower's feeding station in Towson in late January and February. Most of the sparrows wintered in normal numbers; tree sparrows showed an abrupt rise from their low count of the previous winter, and Brackbill submitted 2 reports of this species in heavily populated sections of Baltimore during the heavy snows. White-throated sparrows were especially common in the Piedmont. Fox sparrows arrived on Feb. 22 at Towson (Mrs. Beerbower) and Dickeyville (Mrs. Bragg), and by the 28th this species was well distributed throughout the eastern part of the State. Song sparrows were in full song at Arbutus on Feb. 13 (Hampe), and at Govans on the 19th; Hampe noted the first migrants at Arbutus on the 15th. Two snow buntings were closely observed by many members of the M.O.S. and the District Audubon Society at Ocean City on Feb. 22-23, and on the 23rd, Irston Barnes and the Audubon Society closely observed a single Lapland longspur, establishing the third Maryland record for this species.

C. S. Robbins

MIDWINTER FIELD TRIP, BLACKWATER REFUGE-OCEAN CITY

On February 21, thirteen expectant birders crossed the Chesapeake Bay on the 8 A.M. Ferry to Matapeake. Our loader was Chandler S. Robbins, except at Blackwater where our genial guide was Steele Webster. Good weather prevailed the first day.

Our first interesting find was a great black-backed gull over Kent Narrows, an uncommon bird that far from the coast. On the Choptank River at Cambridge we were greeted with the inspiring sight of large rafts of swans and Canada geese, plus numerous ducks. At Blackwater Refuge we were favored with a good look at three brown-headed nuthatches and an unusual find of 17 wintering blue-winged teal. These ducks usually winter from South Carolina and the Gulf Coast southward.

On Sunday morning we emerged from the hotel in Berlin to find the ground covered with fresh, slushy snow and more snow falling. After breakfast, however, we headed for Ocean City - perhaps with more hope than sanity. Our arrival was greeted with winds of gale force which chilled us and drove the snow and sand into our faces. The ocean was very rough and the Coast Guard had small craft warnings posted. However, by mid-morning the snow stopped falling.

In spite of the bad weather, we were rewarded with the opportunity to study the antics of two snow buntings at close range, as they ran or flew about over the snow. Also of interest were the red-backed sandpipers and sanderlings, and a flock of brant seen on the flats in Assawoman Bay.

Throughout the entire trip we saw numerous hawks. On the return trip from Ocean City, many small land birds, whose regular feeding ground had been covered by the recent snow, were seen feeding all along the road. The most interesting among them were the horned larks and Savannah sparrows.

Forty-seven species were seen on each of the two days, and our trip total was 62 species. The trip was, without doubt, a very successful one.

Clark G. Webster

WINTERING PHOEBE AT JOPPA. Evans Roberts reports that his feeding station at Joppa, Harford County, has had a phoebe as a regular visitor all winter. Tree sparrows joined his feeding birds in January. He and Frank Sommer report that this area also has a wintering hermit thrush.

GOOD JUNIOR LIST. Jerry Hart, age 10, of the West Side School at Cumberland, reports seeing 129 species of birds last year.

CLUB EVENTS

(January - February, 1948)

JANUARY MEETING. A fine attendance greeted Clayton Hoff, of Wilmington, Delaware, at the January monthly meeting, and enjoyed his enthusiastic personality and excellent color movies of birds of the Delmarva Peninsula. Terns, shorebirds and black skimmers featured the reel. Mr. & Mrs. Hoff seemed to enjoy the meeting nearly as much as we enjoyed their presence, and were high in praise of the activity of the Society. Mr. Hoff is Executive Secretary of the Brandywine Valley Association, and outstanding soil conservation group with headquarters at Wilmington, and has long been a prominent student of birds of the Eastern Shore.

DAY'S COVE, JANUARY 11. Nineteen members turned out on a very cold day to check the after-hunting-season status of waterfowl in the Gunpowder Area, only to find the creeks so solidly frozen that virtually no ducks could get within telescope range. Some 40 American goldeneyes, 4 black ducks and 200 swans were about the extent of observable waterfowl. There were some interesting small land birds at Otter Point, however, and much enthusiasm greeted the observations of the beautiful, if common, bluebirds of that region. Irving Hampe and Helen Coggins were the trip leaders.

SEMINAR OPENING, JANUARY 12. The beginning of a new venture for the Society found 32 eager 'students' on hand for the first session of our first Seminar on Basic Ornithology. Enrollment was to be limited to 25, but the point was stretched a little, and a total of 35 was accepted. Mr. Crowder, conductor of the seminar, presided at the first session, outlining objectives and discussing the history of ornithology, the history of bird life, and bird classification. A 15-question quiz was distributed as "homework" for the next session, and members chosen to present papers on topics related to the evening's subjects.

SEMINAR SESSION #2, JANUARY 19. Mr. Hampe was guest speaker for the evening, and delivered an extremely fine talk. He discussed bird anatomy, outlining the chief features of bird skeletons, the variations and usages of bills, the shapes and functions of wings and tail, the structure of feet, and the nature and arrangement of feathers. The various moults of birds were described, and we became very familiar with the words "altricial" and "precocial" before the evening was over. In the second period of the evening, Bill McHoul presented a paper on evolutionary aspects of bird life, and distributed mimeographed copies of the evolutionary "tree" of bird families. Margaret Frank supplied mimeographed copies of a complete list of bird families, and discussed the basis of classification.

SEMINAR SESSION #3, JANUARY 26. Haven Kolb startled us at the third session of the Seminar by distributing the quiz papers

in advance of his talk, and one look at the words on the quizzes told us that we simply weren't going to understand a thing he had to say. Happily, with Haven's excellent manner of presenting his subject, we were soon on quite good speaking terms with factors of zoogeography, lists of North American faunal regions, and the ecological angle of bird distribution by biomes. Merriam's life zone concept got to be a tangible thing; we learned that the Austro-Riparian Zone included part of Maryland; and we learned also that our state lies chiefly in the eastern deciduous, or "oak-wild turkey" biome. We hope all this whets your appetite for the next seminar, and doesn't frighten you!

SEMINAR SESSION #4, FEBRUARY 2. Mr. Compton Crook undertook the instruction period of this meeting, and delivered a fine talk on Bird Migration. Theories of the migration urge were discussed, as well as the flyway geography, times of migration, and physical aspects of migratory flight. Mr. LaFleur presented a paper on skeletal adaptations in birds, the two textbooks for the seminar (Allen's "Book of Bird Life" and Pettingills "Laboratory & Field Manual of Ornithology") were distributed and reviewed, and the omnipresent quiz papers were passed out.

SEMINAR SESSION #5, FEBRUARY 9. Dr. John Cushing, well known as an authority on bird behavior, provided a wealth of information at the fifth session of the Seminar. Among the items with which we became more conversant were: the definition of territory, the purpose of bird song, courtship patterns, traditional behavior patterns, function of genes. Mrs. Kuch presented a paper on migration routes and flyways, illustrated with mimeographed maps which were distributed to all seminar members.

KENT ISLAND, February 15. The now annual trip to Kent Island found 41 species of birds, including 1500 swans, 200 baldpate, 40 coot, and numerous interesting land birds. Lt. Comdr. Berry, our Annapolis enthusiast led the trip.

BLACKWATER-OCEAN CITY, FEBRUARY 21-22. See Clark Webster's account of this midwinter ocean venture elsewhere in this issue.

CRUICKSHANK LECTURE, FEBRUARY 16. The "dividend lecture", a regular paid-lecture program offered without charge because of the profit made on last year's paid program, proved to be a liberal dividend, indeed. Allan Cruickshank was at his best, and presented "South Along the Suwanee" to a large and enthusiastic audience in the main auditorium of the Pratt Library.

CROWDER AT UPPER FALLS, FEBRUARY 20. The east central part of Baltimore County got its first bird talk on February 20 when

Mr. Crowder, speaking for the Society, talked to a large group of adults and children at the Upper Falls School. Color pictures by Heidenkamp were used as illustrations, and the enthusiasm engendered led to a special Upper Falls field trip a few weeks later, when nearly 50 observers, mostly school children, turned out to sample the pleasures of bird watching.

SEMINAR SESSION #6, FEBRUARY 23. Hervey Brackbill was guest speaker at the sixth seminar session, and made the discussion of nesting and the care of young a most interesting period of instruction. He told us of the factors governing the time of nestbuilding and the choice of locations, discussed the activities of each sex in the selection of sites, and outlined the time-table of nest construction. Egg laying, incubation, feeding of young, nest sanitation and the history of second broods were treated in order. After the talk, Miss Pearl Heaps presented a paper on Color in Bird Plumages.

CROWDER AT FREDERICK, FEBRUARY 24. A busy February took Mr. Crowder to Frederick on February 24 for the first bird talk we know of in that vicinity. We were told that no one in Frederick would be interested in birds, but the meeting of the University Women in the Frederick County Historical House overflowed with visitors until it was hard to find room for the movie projector. Questions from the floor virtually took over the program, and the obvious enthusiasm of the audience spoke well for the chances of a Frederick County branch of the Society. Mrs. Mabel Hoyler managed the program.

DICKEYVILLE FIELD TRIP, FEBRUARY 28. The day dawned foggy with intermittent showers, and the outlook for a successful trip was anything but good. Twenty-three observers showed up, however, and we started out along Gwynns Falls, observing a number of normal winter species as we went. Near the Dickeyville bridge we saw a flock of robins - the first of the season for many of us. We were disappointed on not seeing purple finches, as they had been abundant here on last year's trip. We followed the stream to Gwynn Oak Avenue, but found few birds after passing the feeding stations of the Pickwick Road area. A total of 17 species was observed. Leaders were Rockwell Smith and Theodore Brannan.

T. M. Brannan

MEMBERSHIP REPORT. At the end of February, the membership of the Society stood at 636, compared with a total of 231 at the end of February one year ago. The total included 470 adults, 117 individual juniors and 49 affiliated junior clubs. Members were distributed over 20 of Maryland's 23 counties, with 341 in Baltimore City and County, 174 in Allegany, 14 in Washington County, 14 in Montgomery, 10 in Anne Arundel, and smaller numbers in the other counties.