

MARYLAND BIRDLIFE

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THE SEASON

September - October, 1948

The months of September and October represent the most interesting part of the fall, ornithologically speaking; for during this period most summer residents, their numbers first swelled by an influx of more of the same species from farther north, depart for their winter homes. In addition, this is the period when the great majority of transient species pass through, and when at least the vanguard of nearly all winter resident species arrive. In a summary of this active season only certain highlights can be pointed out, while some 150 species receive no mention at all. The migration as a whole proceeded according to schedule, since weather conditions were quite normal throughout the period.

Grebes, Herons. An unusually fine flight of pied-billed grebes was first noted in West Virginia by Maurice Brooks. It then spread to Maryland and Virginia, with highest counts coming from the head of Chesapeake Bay. R. E. Stewart and C. G. Webster counted 57 between Bush River and Perry Point on October 3. American egrets were particularly abundant; a flock of 104 was noted as late as October 2 in the Elliot Island marsh by Stewart and Webster, and a few individuals of both the American and snowy egrets remained throughout the month. As usual, the little blue heron departed before the egrets; it was last reported on October 5 at Winter's Run marsh, a branch of the Bush River along the Pulaski Highway (Stewart & Webster).

Geese and Ducks. Geese and several species of waterfowl appeared earlier than usual, but a lone ring-necked duck at Kent Narrows on October 2 (Stewart & Webster) was the only record-breaking observation. Numbers of many species, particularly baldpate and blue-winged teal, were conspicuously higher than last year, although many of the diving ducks were still below normal at the close of the period.

Shorebirds, Gulls and Terns. A Hudsonian godwit seen on Assateague Island on September 5 by Stewart & Robbins, and marbled godwits seen at the same place on Oct. 2 (4) and Oct. 10 (1) by J. H. Buckalew are further evidence that these rare shorebirds occur on the Maryland coast each fall. The continued increase in abundance of the great black-backed gull has made this species perfectly regular in occurrence along the Maryland coast in winter, and has also resulted in more and more records from the Chesapeake Bay and the tidal Potomac; it has also delayed the spring departure well into May, and now has brought autumn migrants in early Septem-

ber. This year 5 adults and 1 immature were found in the Maryland section of Assateague Island as early as September 5 (Buckalew, Stewart, et al.). T. W. Donnelly recorded 3 late Caspian terns at Blackwater Refuge on October 16.

Cuckoos, Nighthawks, Swifts. The last cuckoos reported were a black-bill from Hagerstown on September 20 (W. B. Green) and a late yellow-bill at Cabin John on October 2 (L. M. Wendt et al.). The latest chimney swifts reported were found at Forest Park on Oct. 17 by Hervey Brackbill. Large numbers of nighthawks were seen migrating on Sept. 3-6 at Govans (Kolb) and at Halethorpe (Hampe). Roxie Simpson and Fern Bell saw 20 at Colesville on the 9th, and the last ones reported were 20 seen at Unity, Montgomery County, on Sept. 20 by Seth Low.

Woodpeckers, Flycatchers. Although the red-headed woodpecker wintered in Forest Park last year, Brackbill observed that the present year has been a bad one for acorns, and writes that the red-head was last found in that area on Oct. 19 of this year. At Patuxent Refuge, where this species is ordinarily only a migrant, the last bird was recorded on September 25. The highest count received from Seneca, one of the most favorable areas for this species, was 13 on October 2 (D. M. Thatcher). Ernest Baldwin found a single bird on October 10 at South Mountain, an area from which we have very few records. The yellow-bellied sapsucker was first seen at Patuxent Refuge on Sept. 25, and on Oct. 2 four more were seen at Seneca (Thatcher). Green saw a crested flycatcher at Hagerstown on Sept. 17, one day after the last individual was found at Patuxent. The last Acadian flycatcher was heard at Patuxent on Sept. 13, and on the 18th a very late bird was collected at Fairbanks by Hampe. Ordinarily, alder flycatchers cannot safely be identified in fall without the taking of a specimen, but on Sept. 12 Dr. Jenison and Mrs. Mary Goldman had a satisfactory observation of a singing bird at Cabin John. A very late olive-sided flycatcher found on the Chase field trip on Sept. 25 by Robbins was observed by many members.

Creepers, Wrens, Gnatcatchers. The brown creeper was first noted at Chase on Sept. 26 (Robbins), but not found elsewhere until the more normal dates of Oct. 2 (Seneca) and Oct. 3 (Patuxent). Winter wrens were especially early, being found on Sept. 23 at South Mountain (Stewart) and Patuxent (Robbins), and on the 26th at Hagerstown (Green). A Bewick's wren was seen at Chevy Chase on Oct. 18 by Dr. H. H. T. Jackson. Gnatcatchers, which are only rarely found in September, were reported as follows: 1 at Forest Park on Sept. 12 (Brackbill), 2 at Patuxent on the next day, and 1 straggler there on Sept. 20 and 21 (A. C. Martin).

Warblers, Blackbirds and Orioles. Kolb observed a late prairie warbler at Loch Raven on Sept. 25; and a record of the Louisian water-thrush at Halethorpe on Oct. 2 (Hampe) is one of the latest on record for the state. The relative scarcity of bobolinks noted through most of the state is at least partially accounted for by enormous flights of this species farther east in New Jersey and Delaware. The orchard oriole, which is one of the first summer birds to depart for the south and is rare even in August, was noted

as late as Sept. 13 at Hagerstown (Green) and Sept. 16 at Halethorpe (Hampe).

Finches and Sparrows. The gradual northward extension of the blue grosbeak is filling in gaps in our knowledge of its migration dates. It now appears that it is not unusual to find this species in late September and early October. This year it remained up to Oct. 3 at Patuxent Refuge. Purple finches were first noted at Hagerstown on Sept. 20 (Green); then at Patuxent on the 23rd. Pine siskins also appeared early, being first seen at South Mountain on Oct. 10 by Baldwin. In the midst of early arrivals of northern finches it seems a little out of place to mention 4 young goldfinches still in the nest at Pikesville on the unprecedented date of Oct. 3 (H. F. & I. K. Kuch); by 8 o'clock the following morning the large young had left the nest. An early Savannah sparrow was seen at Triadelphia Reservoir on Sept. 11 by Simpson and Bell, and six days later 1 was found at Wye Mills. White-throated sparrows were also recorded earlier than usual, the first being discovered at Hagerstown on Sept. 22 (Green); the next report was of 2 individuals at Patuxent on the following day. The species did not become common at Loch Raven until Oct. 16. On this same day, Kolb noted peak numbers of swamp and song sparrows.

Chandler S. Robbins.

THE JOY OF FEEDING OUR WINTER BIRDS

With a "chickadee diner" on our east dining room window sill and a glass covered feeder for suet and seed on our south living room window sill, we have brought our bird friends very near to us. With four suet boxes on trees about the house, we enjoy birds of many varieties all during the day.

Several pairs of titmice, chickadees, downy woodpeckers, white-throated sparrows, red-headed woodpeckers, a beautiful pair of red-bellied woodpeckers, juncos, two pairs of cardinals, many nuthatches, hairy woodpeckers and one friendly pair of song sparrows we watch daily. I have found that, by throwing out scraps of food and crumbs, the blue jays, starlings and English sparrows stay away from the feeders. They seem to know they are not too welcome, as they do annoy the other birds.

Late in winter the clear notes of the song sparrows and cardinals make one feel that spring is on the way, soon verified by the appearance of the first robins on the lawn.

We make up a dozen small paper cups filled with melted suet mixed with seed or chopped nuts about once a week; these fit into the "chickadee diner". And at least once a week I buy a bag of wild bird seed plus a pound of sunflower seed - and about three pounds of suet a week, but we feel that, if necessary, we could go without food ourselves to feed these bird friends because of the joy and interest they bring to us daily.

Gertrude J. Hibberd, Brooklandville

C L U B E V E N T S
September - October, 1948

FALL OPENING, CHASE, SEPT. 26. The annual program opener drew a crowd of 55 people, including goodly delegations from Frederick and Prince Georges Counties. The field trip took in Bengies Point, noted fall warblers and spotted a very late olive-sided flycatcher, giving most of the large crowd a very good look at a life-list-new bird. The monthly meeting took place on the lawn overlooking the river, and business paused repeatedly to watch graceful egrets flying by, or to study the 6 pied-billed grebes who also attended the meeting.

ST. FRANCIS SANCTUARY, OCT. 9. Sixteen members were met at Pikesville by Mr. & Mrs. Kuch, leaders, to visit the Sanctuary of St. Francis of Assisi, on Woodholme Avenue. This 8-acre tract is sustained by the Bird Club of the Humane Society of Baltimore County.

The 21 bird boxes were all examined carefully. It was noted that the bluebirds preferred the boxes in the open to those near trees and shrubbery. Thirty-two varieties of birds were identified, including a number of phoebes, myrtle warblers, black-throated green warblers, a tellow palm warbler and purple finches.

The group enjoyed immensely their subsequent visit to "Timber Run" farm near Reisterstown, property of Mrs. Bolling Barton, President of the Humane Society. On our birding expedition over the farm, a percheron, two riding horses, a mule and last but not least by any means, "Daffodil" the young bull, followed us about like pet dogs! Daffodil, who doesn't know his strength nor the sharpness of his well-natured horns, became a bit too playful to suit the tastes of some of our members. They breathed a sigh of relief when he was finally on the other side of a securely closed gate, and attention could be turned to finishing our bird observations.

Carrie Lipscomb

MONTHLY MEETING, OCTOBER 15. The first indoor meeting of the fall filled the Pratt Library meeting room and enjoyed a return visit from Dr. & Mrs. Tousey. Dr. Tousey showed some more of his excellent 8mm. films, proving anew the surprising capabilities of a small camera when used in connection with a pair of binoculars, Tousey style. Pictures of gannets on the cliffs of Bonaventure Island were especially delightful.

HAWK MOUNTAIN, OCTOBER 23-24. Fourteen members made the weekend pilgrimage to Hawk Mountain this year, shivering a bit while sweeping the northern horizon with binoculars and counting hawks. The buteos were most plentiful, and the group counted 62 red-tails and 32 red-shoulders. Fourteen sharp-shinned hawks and one immature eagle were seen, not to mention 50 turkey vultures and some 600 crows.

PATUXENT REFUGE, OCTOBER 31. Leonard Llewellyn and Bill Green led a group of 25 members through the beautiful fall coloring in the Refuge to see 39 species of birds. No rarities were observed, but the note of fall was sounded by the presence of horned larks, brown creepers, both kinglets and fox sparrows.

AMERICAN EGRET EATS A MOLE

On August 23, 1948 we saw an American egret standing on a lawn adjacent to the Sanctuary of St. Francis of Assisi, at Woodholme Avenue in Pikesville. The grass was rather high and we saw a long, pencil-thin, white neck and head with a yellow bill sticking up above the weeds. As we watched, the head suddenly shot down and forward into the grass, then snapped back with a mole wiggling in its bill.

The egret proceeded to turn the mole around and around until he had it by the neck and could choke it to death. This maneuvering took several minutes and as soon as Mr. Mole ceased to struggle he was swallowed whole. The egret apparently had no difficulty swallowing this large morsel although he did have to take a couple of swallows to move it down a long slender throat.

We could watch the progress of the mole by the bulges which went lower and lower with each swallow. Having finished his snack, the egret took off and sailed away ten feet above our heads.

Ilse Kind Kuch
(Mrs. Herman F. Kuch, Jr.)