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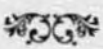

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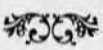

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SUMMER WARBLERS OF SHELBY COUNTY

By BEN B. COFFEY, JR.

If one's study has been carried on chiefly in the two wooded parks of Memphis he would immediately think of the Kentucky and the Hooded Warblers. The student who has skirted the borders of Wolf River, Horn Lake, and various bayous would think of the Prothonotary Warbler. And in more open situations we find the Maryland Yellow-throat. These four, to my mind, are the outstanding beauties which spend the summer with us, although we can find the Redstart if we know where to look.

The Kentucky and Hooded Warblers are always associated together in my thoughts of them. Preferring the same ravine and heavily shaded hillside environments, with a similar liquid quality of tone in their song notes, and with the same colors predominating, this would only be natural. Reed's Bird Guide does not do full justice to the bright yellow underparts of either, and the black crown and ear coverts of the former and black hood of the latter gives a brilliant contrast. The Kentucky Warbler is the Overton Park warbler; in the spring its loud, clear "ron-dee, ron-dee, ron-dee" is heard throughout the park woods morning and evening. It is more common throughout the country than the Hooded Warbler and may be found in most damp ravines and wooded creek bottoms. The Hooded Warbler is the Riverside Park warbler, and is very common near the stream course there. Its interrogative "come and see me" is of a liquid tone.

Along Wolf River, Nonconnah Creek, Horn Lake and bayous we find, usually without much delay, the Prothonotary Warbler. The old name of Golden Swamp Warbler is more appropriate, and my Scouts and I call it the "tweet-tweet" bird. Certainly no other bird's notes are as similar to the popular printed conception of a bird's song. The loud, clear, ringing "tweet-tweet-tweet-tweet" attracts instant attention, but when the singer is located its beauty eclipses the vernal freshness of its song. Another song, not so loud, heard in the same localities would cause field glasses to be turned toward the tops of tall cypresses to hunt for the Sycamore Warbler, bearing the yellow throat and black flank streaks. Occasionally he is found in sycamores, the trees that he is more often associated with around Nashville or Hardy (Arkansas), and on two separate trips I heard one at the edge of Piney Woods, half a mile from type environment.

The Louisiana Water-Thrush is often found along our streams with the Kentucky or Hooded Warblers. I have a picture taken May 18, 1928, of four young in a nest found under tree roots at the Raleigh-Wolf River beach, within three feet of a path in continual use by swimmers and picnickers. It has a beautiful wild-spirited song and can be easily recognized by its habit of continually flirting its tail. (Only the Spotted Sandpiper (uncommon) and Palm Warbler (migrant) do likewise.)

The Redstart has been found to be quite common throughout the summer in the wooded bottom lands of the Mississippi itself, west of the Y. & M. V. R. R., south of town, and from the line of bluffs to the river, north of town. "La Candelita" is not seen elsewhere except during migration, when it is very common. The Parula Warbler is found in the same character of environment, but its territory seems to include similar localities throughout the country. During the summer of 1928 one was my "unknown warbler" of Piney Woods. I might add here that this warbler is very common in Overton Park during early fall. The Black and White Warbler is found in late summer in the Redstart's territory, but these may only be migrants.

The Maryland Yellow-throat and Yellow-breasted Chat are found in open country, with thickets. The former, with its "witch-ee-ty, witch-ee-ty, witch-ee-ty," is very common and frequently nests in the bushes of one's gardens. An inquisitive and peppy little body, this black-masked summer resident should be easy for anyone to know. The Chat is our largest warbler, very shy, and hard to see in its rural haunts, but always found on any trip into likely territory through its ventriloquial, mimicking song, with which he leads you a merry chase. A sight record rewards patience.

We have no summer records of the Cerulean Warbler or Worm-eating Warbler. Nor of the Yellow Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler; these three are found at the Memphis Scout camps (Hardy, Ark.), the first two in the willows along Spring River and the third on the dry scrub oak hillsides. I heard and saw a Prairie Warbler April 26, 1930, at Camp Currier, twenty miles south of town, in Mississippi. The environment was typical; however, I was unable to return for further records.

The Pine Warbler would be accidental. Records for Piney Woods range from March 11 to June 3, 1928.

Because of the history connected with the two "lost species," Bachman Warbler and Swainson Warbler, a search for them is doubly interesting. Some day we hope to find the former. We have found the latter. A pretty liquid "wee-er, wee-er, chee-wee-er" sent me in search of the singer one April morning (23rd) and a careful study of the little brown bird that I found, caused me to go to Reed's Guide at once to make sure of it. It was found in these low damp woods on several succeeding mornings, and once two singers were seen. Last spring my first record was for April 20th, and as late as May, I went out in the evening and listened to it sing almost continuously for twenty to thirty minutes. Its song resembles one of the songs of the Hooded Warbler, and care is needed if identification is made by song. I didn't have the chance to return later or hunt for a nest. Only a male bird apparently was seen, yet I believe we will find a nest some spring soon. I have heard the song of the Swainson Warbler in several other places with similar small cane growth and wet ground, and have one other sight record, on the Y. & M. V. near Horn Lake.

The study of the Warblers is very fascinating and leads us into some beautiful spots. Most of the summer Warblers are easily learned because of their markings and length of stay with us. The common ones can be studied without undue strain on the neck such as we experience during migration, with the exception of the Parula, and once one of these came down to drink almost at my feet. Little creatures, vague and unknown in our ignorance, become delightful intimates with a little study and a little adventure.

Memphis, Tenn., Feb. 19, 1931.

NESTING DATA ON MIDDLE TENNESSEE BIRDS

PART II.

By VERNON SHARP, JR.

In May our bird-life activities attain their greatest impetus. Not only is this the time to follow our most numerous, varied, and interesting migrants, but also we are privileged to hear a most fascinating group of resident species with us. In the last edition of "The Migrant" an account was presented of those native birds which nest before May 15th, roughly speaking.

As the middle of the month arrives our colorful Warbler friends seek out their favored sites and begin brooding. Among these are the Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Sycamore Warbler and Prairie Warbler, soon to be followed by the Pine Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler and Redstart. No more diverse a selection could be chosen from a standpoint of nest locality. Several, by their name, suggest the probable site, as we find the Prairie in rather open meadows, with a limited amount of scrubby trees and bushes; again the Sycamore frequents the outer branches of the smooth-surfaced sycamore, where a most delicate cup-shaped nest, consisting of the finest vegetable fibers, is placed. As a home the Kentucky Warbler selects a clump of bushes and places her nest of leaves and roots on the ground. Usually an open woodland on a rising hillside suggests the haunts of the Hooded Warbler, for it is here that her nest is located in some upright fork several feet from the ground. As would be expected, the Pine Warbler locates her home on the outer branches of a horizontal pine limb, while the Redstart is rather partial to situations along little streams, where her nest is placed fifteen to thirty feet above the ground.

The regal Kingbird builds about May 15th. 'Tis true that this bird deserves the implication, regal, in view of its appearance, actions and lofty nesting site in the topmost branches of some skyward tree. At this date two of our most different Hawks, the Sharp-shinned and Broad-winged, start incubation. The former is a wary, rapid-flying individual which nests in the pine forests, while the latter is exceedingly tame, more sociable and preferring the large forks of an oak or chestnut.

Summing up those of the last ten days of May, we should expect the following: Nighthawk, May 20th; Crested Flycatcher, May 20th; Scarlet Tanager, May 20th; Least Bittern, May 22nd; Whippoorwill, May 25th; Summer Tanager, May 25th; Dickcissel, May 25th; Indigo Bunting, May 25th; Grasshopper Sparrow, May 28th, and last, and from a standpoint of size only, least, the fascinating little Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Each of these birds have numerous facts concerning their breeding habits that are exceedingly unique, but in so limited a space only two will be noted. The Crested Flycatcher, which nests in a bird box or a hollow limb cavity, invariably includes a snake skin in the composition of its nest. There has been considerable comment and speculation upon this fact, but so far as the author knows, there is no record of a nest when this has not been true. No article on this subject could scarcely by written without some special reference to our minute friend, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Once her nest has been completed it is a most difficult task to detect it, but during the building period, by listening for their faint note, the home site can be located. And here may be seen one of the