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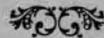
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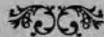
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## FIELD NOTES ON THE SPARROWS OF TENNESSEE

By GEORGE R. MAYFIELD

During migration and in the summer season the warblers challenge the bird observer to his best efforts. The hope of seeing a new warbler or one of the rarer species keeps him ever on the alert at these times, and the measure of his skill can usually be taken from his list of warblers. But there is another family of birds that offers almost as great an incentive to field work in winter as the warblers do from April to October, and it is the aim of this article to arouse a greater interest in the less spectacular but equally important group—the sparrows of Tennessee.

There are sixteen species of the Fringillidae listed already for the Volunteer State and two or three more species are yet to be found and recorded. Many otherwise good observers throw up their hands in despair and say that the sparrows are too difficult for them and thus this family of birds fails to receive the attention rightly due a group of birds that come second only to the warblers in number. And so, the writer will endeavor in this article to give some practical observations of his own and mention some field marks that will enable even beginners to more easily identify them.

The Field Sparrow is the one species which is found the year round throughout the state. He is a lover of hedges, of thickets and even the open field, if a few patches of briars or buckbush are to be found for cover. His sweet, plaintive song can be heard almost every month in the year, and his nesting season extends from early April to late August. His call is a plaintive "cheep," easily mastered, and his abundance, summer and winter, make him an easy mark for beginners.

The Chipping Sparrow is with us from March through October. He prefers yards, gardens and parks. His song is a poor specimen of music, but his persistent attempts at melody make him a most welcome guest around every home. The field mark is a chestnut crown with a lighter line below, and this in turn bordered by a black line through the eye. The young are not so easily identified, but all of them have a sharp chip which is not difficult to master.

In a contest for the world's sweetest singer among birds, the Bachman Sparrow would receive many enthusiastic votes. Only the Wood Thrush, in my estimation, surpasses him in depth of soul and sweetness of melody. This bird arrives about April the first and sings regularly until July. A knowledge of his song will reveal his presence often where he has not been reported. Open pastures with thick grass and low trees are his preference. Finding his nest is the acid test of patience and skill, for it is built on the ground in the thick grass and arched over like that of a Bob-white. Possibly this is done to conceal the eggs, which, unlike those of any other sparrow, are pure white and without markings. A Field Sparrow in appearance,

but without a pinkish bill, is a good mark for recognizing this species in the field.

The Grasshopper Sparrow gets his name from the trilling insect-like song of this sparrow. His companions in clover and high grass are Meadow Larks, Red-wings, Dickcissels and Bobolinks. No wonder his insignificant notes are usually overlooked. Even when heard by a novice, the sound will be attributed to some insect and passed up. The author's veracity has been doubted more often in connection with this bird than any other; due to the bird's elusiveness, the writer has almost been dubbed a nature faker. A blackish crown with central stripe and a yellow mark in front of the eye helps to identify this bird even when he is silent.

The Lark Sparrow is one of our least-known sparrows; only a few records, which have been made at widely-varied intervals and widely-separated localities (Bellemeade golf links, Hendersonville, Kingston Springs and Old Jefferson) over a period of fifteen years, tell the story of his rareness. Nearly all of these records are of migrating birds, in August. Large, handsome, melodious in voice, and easily recognized, he is the bird we should like to substitute for that "little rat of the air," the House Sparrow. Should you see in the open fields a large sparrow with white outer tail feathers and white and chestnut marks on the crown and cheeks, you can count that day a fortunate one in your bird calendar.

After naming the one permanent resident and four summer residents and transient sparrows, a more careful survey of the entire state may change our records to some extent, and any information as to the various species of sparrows will be greatly appreciated. Many of the statements made about the following birds are based on limited observations and are subject to revision at any time.

Present records show that the White-throated Sparrow ranks next to the Field Sparrow in abundance—in some places he is found in even greater numbers. He arrives about the twelfth of October and some stay as late as mid-May. Bright winter days and even dark ones, are made quite cheerful by his vibrant "Peabody. Peabody, Peabody" song. A chorus of many White-throats at eventide makes music which any choir might envy. These birds like thickets and tangles and dense hedges; still they are friendly and approachable. Their white throats, large size and characteristic calls make them very easy to identify.

Next to the White-throat comes the Song Sparrow. Strictly speaking, he could be classed as a permanent resident of Tennessee, since he nests in East Tennessee in considerable numbers and over extensive areas. But for practical purposes he is a winter resident and is so regarded by most of us. These birds are usually found along gullies and streams bordered with plenty of briars and weeds. They come by twos and threes generally, but by following up a narrow stream one may corral a real flock. Arrival in Middle Tennessee is in early October and departure is late March and early April. His presence over the United States, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Canada to the Gulf, makes him the sparrow universal. The best field mark is a black shield in the middle of a gray breast streaked with dark brown lines. His flight is marked by a jerky, pumping sort of movement and his calls are readily learned.

The White-crowned Sparrow may be distinguished from the White-throated by virtue of the fact that the former has no white markings at the throat. The heads of the White-crowned look as if they were bandaged conspicuously with white cotton batting held in place by black tape. He loves old fence rows and gullies lined with briars and thorn bushes. His song is

rather a poor effort, but sounds quite welcome to the admirer of this handsome, proud-looking sparrow. These birds have a vigorous chip which should be learned along with those of the Chipping, the Field, the Song, the White-throat and the Swamp Sparrow. They are all characteristic and aid in locating species which would otherwise be passed by.

The Savannah Sparrow is generally found in grassy fields and damp cut-over meadows. They stay in flocks, but fly as individuals. In fact, they run as long as possible before taking flight. A gray breast streaked with black, without the shield in the center, is a good field mark. There is a streak of yellow before the eye and at the bend of the wing. From October to April they are to be found in the open fields, but no observer need listen for a chip or a song. They must be flushed and followed for identification.

Swamp Sparrows are well-named, since they frequent swamps and marshes, where they slip along like some small water animal, from leaf to leaf or stick to stick. They are very quiet and fairly tame, until frightened. They have black and dark brown colors to match the shadows of the marsh and a whitish throat and unmarked breast. Their song is a kind of chatter and clatter like those of the Marsh Wrens, with which he is so fitly associated. These birds would appear on field lists more often if observers knew their chirps and were willing to follow them into their damp haunts.

Vesper Sparrows love the roadsides, where posts and rails and wires give them a chance to watch the world go by. Late March and early April is the time to watch for a fairly large sparrow with white outer tail feathers. The Lark Sparrow and the Junco also have this field mark, but are so different in other ways that there should be no trouble in separating the three species. Their songs are quite musical and are frequently united to make up an attractive chorus. Strange to say, fall records are extremely rare. The Vesper breeds in the extreme northeastern part of the state.

Fox Sparrows are so named because they bear the tawny color of the Red Fox. They resemble thrushes very much, but the more reddish cast and stronger beak reveal him as one of the fringillidae. Swamps, damp ravines and brier patches appeal to them for winter quarters. They can be found in flocks varying in number from 3 to 30, but usually only 2 or 3 are seen together. A flock of them can make a valley vibrant with melodies that remind one of a chorus of Purple Finches. They also have a loud "cluck" like the scold of a Thrasher.

The Lincoln Sparrow, too, has very few records to his credit. Some ten days after the Song Sparrow has gone North, one should be on the lookout for a bird in the same localities and with similar markings except that the shield at the center of breast is lacking. By May 1 they, too, are gone and fall records are limited to one. His song and chirp I do not know, as he is always silent when I see him, slipping in and out of the undergrowth to prevent a good observation. A closer watch should be kept for this elusive species.

Our smallest sparrow is the Leconte's, and we have less than half a dozen records of this species. It passes through in autumn and again in spring, and may be found in open grassy fields such as are preferred by the Savannah. It is mouse-like in its actions and hard to flush, always alighting again on the ground after a short flight. It has a buffy cast of plumage with unmarked breast.

The Tree Sparrow winters regularly in Kentucky, but is extremely rare in Tennessee. Only in severe winters does he come to our more hospitable climate. Due to his mingling with Field Sparrows and Juncos, the Tree Sparrow might be easily overlooked. Field notes show that he has always

been found when weeds and grasses are heavy with snow, and no record has been made of chirp or song. Those field workers who love to tramp in heavy snows have a good chance to make bird history by giving the Tennessee Ornithological Society more data on this sparrow, so regularly found in latitudes just north of Tennessee. Though larger, he much resembles the Field Sparrow and a chestnut spot right in the center of an unmarked breast is the unfailing sign for recognition.

And finally, fame, if not fortune, awaits that observer who can locate with certainty the Henslow and the Nelson Sparrows. They are due to be here, but skeptics will have to be converted by the believing student before their status can be fixed as one of the growing list of Tennessee birds.

Nashville, Tenn., September, 1931.



## NESTING HABITS OF THE PARULA WARBLER

By F. M. JONES

Accounts of the nesting of the Parula Warbler (*Compsothlypis amer. pusilla*) have but rarely described nests built other than within bunches of tillandsia (Spanish) or usnea (grey-beard) moss. In this mountainous section, the nests I have found are constructed within thick clusters of green hemlock needles and the nest material, comprised chiefly of usnea moss, is brought in and tucked among the hemlock twigs and foliage to complete the domicile. Data is given below on several nests found in Sullivan County, Tennessee, south of Bristol. Other nests, found in Virginia northward from Bristol, were similar in location and construction.

"June 1, 1923, Sullivan County, Tennessee.—Along the road near Jakob's School on Jakob's Creek. Nest containing four fresh eggs in large hemlock thirty feet up and near the extremity of a small limb eight feet from the body of the tree. Nest suspended by and woven in the small twigs and needles. Twigs partly woven over the top with opening to the nest on the side. The material of the nest, apart from the hemlock foliage, was composed of usnea with two or three pieces of grass woven in the nest and a few horse hairs in the interior. The nest proper could not be seen from the ground, as it was entirely concealed by the hemlock needles which formed the outside of the nest. The tree was in an open situation, ten feet from the highway and forty feet from the creek. Bird was on nest when found. Eggs measured 61x46, 62x46, 59x46.

"June 9, 1923—Same locality as above nest, but about two hundred feet farther down stream. Nest with three eggs, apparently about ready to hatch, suspended from the twigs of a horizontal limb of large hemlock tree, 65 feet up and 12 feet out, at the extremity of the limb. Found by climbing the tree. Another nest found along the creek further down on June 15, by watching the birds feed the young, at which task both male and female birds were engaged. This nest visited again on the 27th, after the young had left; one sterile egg remaining. Nest about 50 feet up and 6 feet out from body of the tree.

"June 26, 1931, Sullivan County, Tennessee, Jakob's Creek.—Nest containing three eggs, incubated four days; within six feet of the top of a large hemlock, 85 feet up, and built near the extremity of a small limb eight feet from the body of the tree. Woven to and suspended from small twigs, mostly on one side of the nest. Composed of usnea with a small amount of fine

round grasses, a few horse hairs in lining and spider cocoons stretched and woven throughout the nest. Exterior measurements of nest,  $2\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Interior  $1\frac{3}{8}$  inches wide by  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches deep. Eggs white, with a wreath of fine reddish chestnut specks around the larger ends and with a few specks over the entire surface. Measured:  $65 \times 48$ ,  $65 \times 47$ ,  $65 \times 47$ . Nest found on the 15th by seeing bird carrying nesting material. Remained on nest when visited until touched by my hand. These warblers are very close sitters.

"Several other nests found in same locality also in Johnson and Carter Counties. All were in hemlock trees situated in and woven to the down-drooping twigs and needles, usually to an inner limb near the extremity and the distance from the ground varying from 30 feet (the only one found that low) to 95 feet, and, with the exception of one nest, none of them could be seen until after climbing the tree, and very often they were hard to see then, as the moss blended perfectly with the hemlock foliage which formed the outer portion of the nest. The construction of the nests as a whole were oblong rather than round, and about the size of Vireos' nests, but were woven to the twigs instead of being suspended from them as the Vireos' nests are."

The birds return to the same place each season, as I saw them in every locality visited each succeeding year, including the present one. They are local in distribution, however, and will only be found in certain places.

Bristol, Va., August, 1931.



## ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER

By BEN B. COFFEY, JR.

Certain larger water birds become common in the Memphis area in late summer and early fall, and there is also a large shore-bird migration along the Mississippi during August. The American Egret and the Little Blue Heron are found in flocks on the river and larger lakes, while scattered individuals are often found along creeks and the smaller bodies of water. Some years we are fortunate enough to see flocks of Wood Ibis, the American representative of the stork family, and occasionally a White Pelican with his odd pouched beak. The Great Blue Heron (probably the sub-species Ward's Heron) present throughout the year, is also to be seen, but in numbers far too few.

The American Egret and the immature Little Blue Heron are almost without exception called "White Cranes" here and throughout the country; a mistake made alike by the sportsman impressed by their apparently large size and snowy whiteness and by the native hunter or guide familiar with them enough to be interested. One author suggests that the misnomer is due to the influence of the Japanese decorations on our imported articles; perhaps childhood tales of foreign origin play their part also. Some observers are not aware of the great difference in size of these two separate herons; the Egret is 41 inches from tip of the bill to the tip of the tail, while the Little Blue is but 22 inches. Others think that the latter are the young of "White Cranes." When the birds are first encountered for the season it is often difficult to estimate size without thoughtful observation. After that, a correct estimate of the size will identify the specimen, as any similar white bird is rare here. The Egret is pure white except legs and feet, which are black; the bill is mainly yellow. The immature Little Blue is white with

touches of bluish on primaries or outer wing feathers, greenish-yellow legs and bill mainly black. The similar Snowy Heron, which some day may stage a comeback, so that they will again visit this section, has legs and bill mainly black and toes yellow. The adult Little Blue Heron is larger and more slimly built than the Little Green Heron or "Shite-poke," and has a maroon, rather than a chestnut neck. The immature Little Blues acquire the slate-blue color the second winter and third spring, and by the next spring complete the adult plumage with a maroon neck.

My record of these two for 1928 starts with an Egret in a flooded cotton field at Lakeview, on Lake Cormorant, July 8. Then followed my trips across islands and chutes to Middle Bar, five miles above Memphis, to study Least Tern nests. On July 31, there were four immature Little Blues and on August 2, thirteen; on the fifth I counted 70 immature and 11 adults (blue, two or three-year-old birds). On the afternoon of September 15, two scouts and I saw about 120 immature and one adult Little Blues and about 25 Egrets, all frequenting small ponds or gathering to roost in the tops of willows on an island. A small number were seen the next day. On my last trip, September 22, I saw about 45 to 50 immature Little Blues and 18 to 20 Egrets. In 1929 many trips were made up the Mississippi, but the number seen was somewhat less than the summer previous. Both in 1929 and 1930 my trips did not continue late enough to see the usual flocks, and as the Least Terns nested early again this year, all my river trips were in June. On July 19, about six or eight Egrets were seen on Horn Lake.

Because the Egret and immature Little Blue Herons are so often reported as "White Cranes," it may be well to give here the status of the real cranes, none of which, by the way, have I been able to record locally. In North America this family is represented by the Whooping Crane, the Sandhill Crane and a subspecies of the latter from Alaska, the Little Brown Crane. The Whooping Crane is our largest wading bird, and, as distinguished from the Egret, is very much larger, its whitish plumage is broken by the black color of the primary wing feathers, and, like all cranes, it flies with its neck extended like that of a goose. It is now so rare that it is practically a relic of the past and is one of the only three diminishing species that cannot even be collected for museum exhibition. The Sandhill Crane is mostly light brown in color, is smaller than the Whooping Crane, but larger and more trimly proportioned than the Great Blue Heron. The Little Brown Crane is a counterpart of the Sandhill, but is only about three-fourths its size. These Cranes, which were formerly common in all of our prairie states, are now making their last stand in the far Northwest and they have become so rare that it is probable they may never again be recorded in this state.

The Wood Ibis, or Gourd-head, is an odd-looking stork-like bird, white with greenish black tail and outer wing feathers and bare (unfeathered) head and neck. It is approximately the size of the Egret, but in flight does not carry the head drawn close to the breast as herons do. They nest along the Gulf Coast and in late summer move northward in an irregular fashion. Personal records are: September 15, 1928, twelve, and the 16th, fifteen, near Middle Bar. On July 28, 1929, a flock of about 110 were seen gracefully wheeling and soaring at a height of about 400 feet above Middle Bar. A few came down lower over the mud flat and slough, but after a few minutes the whole flock moved off to the northeast.

The White Pelican is also a large white bird with black outer wing feathers, but its immense size and pouch-like beak distinguishes it from all other denizens of the river. Yet, fishermen who mentioned seeing flocks of white birds with black wing tips were unable to describe them, so that I could

know whether they were Pelicans or Wood Ibis. A few men knew the two apart. The Pelican probably migrates from the western interior of the continent through this section and doubtless a few occur here regularly. My only record was made on September 15, 1928, one being seen on a mud flat at Middle Bar. It was discovered at night when attracted by the beam of a flashlight.

Large numbers of shore-birds are found on the mud flats and edges of the sand bars, up until about August 15. I shrink from listing the species—identification of these “peeps” and “snipe” is an ordeal, particularly in their drab fall plumage. However, I might say the Solitary, the Least and the Semi-palmated Sandpipers are very common, and Semi-palmated Plovers and Yellowlegs are regularly seen. No picture of the “Father of the Waters” here is complete without mention of the graceful Least Tern or “Sea Swallow,” as it is sometimes called. On sizzling hot days when the dry sand-bars take on the appearance of the Sahara, the cheerful tinkling call of small flocks of these little birds may be heard as they glean their fill of “skip-jacks” from the turbulent, muddy waters. In August they are joined by transient flocks of Black Terns and before many weeks they have both allowed themselves to become towed along, as it were, to the Gulf, where they make their winter home.

Favored here with a good location for the study of water birds, perhaps we can make sufficient land and water field trips to better our acquaintance with this interesting division of our bird life.

Memphis, Tennessee, August, 1931.

### ANNUAL SPRING FIELD DAY

On May 17, the Annual Spring Field Day of the T. O. S. was held at Sycamore, in Cheatham County, twenty miles northwest of Nashville. In attendance it brought out a record crowd, there being about fifty people on hand, mostly members. Among those present from a distance were Mr. and Mrs. H. P. Ijams and Mr. and Mrs. John Bamberg of Knoxville, Mr. and Mrs. Ben B. Coffey and three members of Scout Troop No. 1 of Memphis, Miss Margaret Stacker, Miss Lillian Bayer and Prof. H. C. Major of Cumberland City. On arriving at the chosen site the group separated into parties and made a census of the surrounding area. In the afternoon a lesser excursion was undertaken, which included the finding of a number of Woodcock in a spring branch and a Bob White's nest with eggs nearby. The total list for the day numbered 75 species; regrettably, it cannot be published with this, for lack of space. After an excellent luncheon, cooked in the open and served under the sycamores, retiring President Ganier called for the annual election of officers. This resulted in the election of Harry P. Ijams of Knoxville, president; Messrs. Ben B. Coffey, Jr., of Memphis, Wayland J. Hayes of Nashville, and John Bamberg of Knoxville were elected vice-presidents. Other officers elected were Miss Vera Kearby, secretary; Compton Crook, treasurer; Albert F. Ganier, curator, and George B. Woodring, editor.

We hope to have an article in the December number on the winter feeding of birds. Do not await that time, however, before getting your feeding shelf in operation, lest your winter birds pass you by for a more hospitable home.

The Fall Field Day will be held as usual, some time in October, near Nashville. Arrange to attend and meet others who share your interest in birds. The first fall meeting at Nashville will be on Monday, September 21st, at 8 p. m., at the Social Religious Building, Peabody College.

## THE ROUND TABLE

FIELD NOTES FROM MEMPHIS: On May 31st, a dozen members of the Memphis section of the T. O. S. had a field day at Horn Lake, on the Mississippi line. Nearly sixty species were listed, among which were a flock of 120 Least Tern and a Bachman Sparrow in song. On May 6, an Anhinga, or "Snake Bird," was taken at Turrell, Ark., twenty miles north of Memphis; it spoiled before it could be preserved by a taxidermist, but I have the tail feathers. During June I visited the nesting colony of Least Tern on Middle Bar, above Memphis (See Wilson Bulletin, June, 1930, pp. 103-7), from two to five times a week. Due to low water this year, the first egg was laid about May 31st, when the riger gauge read 13 feet. The eggs were laid every other day generally, two or three comprising a set. The Terns apparently rely on the sun to assist them in the task of incubation. They "fish" about four miles down the river, at the foot of Mud Island, returning to the bar about 7 p. m. to roost. H. C. Monk of Nashville visited this colony with me on June 7th. By the middle of June, flocks of Purple Martins were noted on the river. Not more than 75 were in a flock, but later these flocks became very large. Eight Black Terns were noted on June 8th, probably going North. One or two wild Mallards were noted, with young, in June; by July, in spite of rains, most of the sloughs had dried up. On June 27th, at Reelfoot Lake, I made a good list of birds, including about 25 Egrets and 20 Cormorants. Prothonotary Warblers were much in evidence. In July, a trip to the Arkansas bottoms showed the usual list, including Chats and Dickcissels, with young. On August 2nd, I made a trip to Grassy Lake, Tenn., 12 miles north of Memphis. The lessee reported several "White Cranes," probably Egrets; two Fish Crows were noted on this lake, being identified by their drawing call note. B. B. Coffey, Jr., Memphis, Tenn.

This is assuredly a state-wide number. Messrs. Jones' and Coffey's notes were taken 450 miles apart.

Under date of August 12th, Mr. G. P. Dillon of Erin writes: "We have a pair of Mockingbirds which have started their third nest for the season. I have not tried to examine the contents because I have known these birds to desert their nest after people had looked into them. Also, we have a Bob White sitting on twelve eggs in one of our pea patches, at the present time."

The Knoxville Chapter, T. O. S., held a Field Day on May 9, as a feature of the meeting there of the Tennessee Academy of Science. The time was spent at the Island Home Bird Preserve of H. P. Ijams, where, in addition to making a bird census, the visitors were shown nesting boxes, feeding stations, traps and other paraphernalia for bird banding. A detailed map of the preserve has been prepared and each year a copy of it is marked up to show the location and dates of all nests found in the area, thus keeping a running record of the nesting activities and probable number of young raised.

Mrs. Arch Cochran, Mrs. Fred C. Laskey and Mrs. Sanford Duncan of Nashville are actively engaged in trapping and bird banding. They are very enthusiastic over this method of bird study, and we hope to hear from them in these columns before long. Our president-elect, Harry P. Ijams of Knoxville, has been an active bander for a number of years. Prof. Wyman R. Greene of Chattanooga, who specializes in banding Chimney Swifts, is expecting to continue his work this fall. A number of others of our members hold banding permits, but we have not heard from them.

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