Another remarkable record revolves around Ohio's only accepted record of Harris's hawk, a native of the southwestern US and points south. Although the species is largely resident, dispersals have occurred on rare occasions in the winter months, whereupon birds appear outside their normal range. It is a gregarious bird, and one that adapts well to captivity; it is a species popular with falconers. This said, our story (*Wilson Bulletin* 30(1):15-16, 1918) begins with Thomas M. Earl, a well-known Columbus area taxidermist, receiving a parcel post package from J.H. McKinley of Harrisburg, Ohio, on December 29, 1917. Although it was customary for Earl to receive specimens from McKinley for mounting, unlike normal shipments this one arrived without written comments. Earl recognized it as a Harris's hawk, and stated "I could not bring myself to think that it had not been shipped in from the Texan border by some soldier friend perhaps" of McKinley. Several weeks passed before Earl finally spoke with McKinley. The latter maintained that "The hawk in question was shot by a farmer, living some four miles southeast of Harrisburg, on or about December 24, 1917. On the morning of that day a pair of these hawks were molesting this man's poultry and had killed one or two of them when they were frightened away. In the afternoon they returned, when the farmer, armed with a shotgun, killed this one, the mate then disappearing. After lying around for several days, the hawk was then brought to town and given to me." Thus the hawk came into McKinley's possession, and finally into Earl's. The specimen still exists, and resides at the Ohio State Museum in Columbus. It bears no signs of captivity, and is in good condition. In concluding his article, Earl sums up: "It is a remarkable coincidence in name that a *Harris* hawk should have been first taken near *Harris*burg, Ohio." (italics in the original).

It should be noted that the following is purely conjecture, and a wild one at that. It is a fact, however, that an institution known as the "Liar's Club" was commonplace in turn-of-the-century small-town America. A group of like-minded folks would gather together regularly with the express purpose of telling "tall tales," the taller the better, and all with a straight face. There was no malicious intent, but if someone from outside the club were to believe one of their tales, well…all the better. But to make sure that no one in the club would be fooled by a tale that had circulated in the outside world, club members would include an aside, or a sort of "wink-wink" acknowledgment, in each tale meant to be recognized only by club members, thus saving them from the gullibility of outsiders. An example of such a "wink-wink" acknowledgment might be something along the lines of "Isn't it curious Mr. Bass caught his record trout on Bass Lake?" or even "Isn't it peculiar that a Harris's hawk would be found in Harrisburg, Ohio?"

Not to belabor my precarious point, or risk ridicule for your old retired editor, but I find it a curious coincidence that this story ties in with bird banding. Bird banders have a widely-accepted form of abbreviating the names of bird species, used to save time when hustling to band, record, and release many birds during a busy period. For bird species with two-word names, such as yellow warbler, banders traditionally abbreviate using the first two letters of the first word and the first two letters of the second, giving us YEWA in this example. Likewise, for American woodcock the abbreviation would be AMWO, for wood thrush it would be WOTH, and for Harris's hawk it would be…….

Ohio Grassland Breeding Bird Survey

by Jim McCormac

Neotropical migrants—such as warblers, tanagers, flycatchers, etc. —have garnered their fair share of attention lately due a perception that many of these species are on the decrease. While this is probably true, neotropicals face a threat that we North Americans are largely powerless to affect—the destruction of Central and South American wintering habitat. There is at the same time another group of birds that is likely even more at risk, a risk that prevails here in the midwestern United States.

Grassland birds are familiar to most birders: meadowlarks, bobolinks, short-eared owls, and various sparrows, such as grasshopper and Henslow's. Prior to settlement and large-scale alterations of North American ecosystems by Europeans, grassland species were confined to the vast prairies of the central U.S., which extended as far east as central Ohio. In Ohio, there were several large prairie regions: the Sandusky Plains, which covered parts of Crawford, Marion, and Wyandot counties, and of which Killdeer Plains is the only substantial remnant; the Pickaway Plains, a huge prairie that occupied central Pickaway and Ross counties south of Circleville; and the Darby Plains in Madison and Union counties, including the location of the proposed Darby Plains National Wildlife Refuge. There were numerous other prairies, too—some substantial, most small, but today sharing one trait—almost all have been destroyed by agriculture or other development.

Of the nearly 1200 square miles of original Ohio prairie, less than 1% remains, giving this habitat the dubious distinction of being our rarest natural feature. Given

Large expanse of open grassland at Crown City WA showing the invasion of Asian bush-clover, Lespedeza cuneata (the lighter shaded areas). This introduced weed overruns enormous areas, and is largely worthless for avifauna. However, northern bobwhite and Henslow's sparrow do frequently utilize this habitat. Photo by Jim McCormac.

this, it's remarkable that any grassland bird species remain part of our avifauna. Sadly, one species was eliminated—the greater prairie chicken, which inhabited prairies in central and northwest Ohio. Not as resilient as other grassland species, these magnificent creatures disappeared from the state by the mid-1930s. Surprisingly however, the prairie chicken is one of only a few Ohio birds extirpated as breeders, others including merlin, Bachman's sparrow, and piping plover.

Fortunately, most of our grassland species are adaptable enough to exploit artificial habitats created by farming practices, and shifted to these new habitats as the native prairies were plowed under. During the early to mid-1900's, small farms were the rule, and there was always plenty of suitable "grassland" habitat in the form of pastures, fallow fields, and hay meadows. In recent decades, many small farming operations have been consolidated into mega-farms, whose practices tend to favor higher productivity and "cleaner" agriculture; consequently they provide little in the way of suitable habitat for grassland birds.

A seemingly unrelated development in the early 1970's proved of great benefit to Ohio's grassland bird life. Reacting to public outcry resulting from tremendous environmental damage caused by vast unreclaimed strip-mines in southeastern Ohio, the Ohio legislature enacted mining reclamation laws in 1974. As a result, thousands of acres of open rolling grasslands were created throughout unglaciated southeastern Ohio, sited on abandoned mines that prior to reclamation had resembled lunar landscapes devoid of life. Although this newly created habitat resembles the African savannas more than any feature occurring naturally in Ohio, grassland birds found the reclamation sites suitable as breeding grounds. Currently, the greatest concentrations

Open grassland at Crown City WA. This habitat supports grasshopper, Henslow's, and savannah sparrows, occasionally northern harrier and short-eared owl, and numerous other species. The white tubes in the foreground protect tree seedlings, an attempt at habitat alteration which might not be advisable in these areas, given the high usage of grassland species. Photo by Jim McCormac.

of grassland species in Ohio are now found in these areas.

Over the past several years, the Division of Wildlife of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources has acquired four wildlife areas—Crown City, Egypt Valley, Tri-Valley, and Woodbury—now located on reclaimed strip-mine, and collectively totaling over 61,000 acres. Recognizing that these sites support grassland birds, Division of Wildlife provided me with a two-year grant to document the avifauna of these wildlife areas. The resulting information can be used to assist in making management decisions, and to insure that significant populations of unusual breeding birds are protected.

Our 1999 field season was comprised of two survey periods: 25 May to 15 June, and 15 July to 5 August. A network of approximately 45 volunteers was enlisted to conduct survey routes on the wildlife areas. Each route consisted of a half-mile of road bisecting suitable grassland habitat; surveyors walked this route and recorded numbers and species of all birds seen or heard on either side of the road. Using this method, we were able to obtain an excellent representative sampling of grassland bird life on approximately 12,000 to 15,000 acres of open reclaimed land in the counties of Belmont, Coshocton, Gallia, Lawrence, and Muskingum.

Even though the majority of habitat along the survey routes was grassland, a surprising number of species unanticipated in grassland areas were recorded. While this is due in part to many unexpected species utilizing what would appear to be suboptimal habitats of black locust thickets and autumn olive tangles, another reason is that vocalizations can be heard for long distances in these open habitats, and songs from distant woodlots could often be detected. A total of 105 species was recorded,

Typical early successional shrubland interspersed among open grassland. Blue grosbeaks are invariably present in this habitat at Crown City WA, as are orchard oriole, yellow-breasted chat, prairie warbler, and others. Photo by Jim McCormac.

collectively, from the four wildlife areas. In the summaries for each wildlife area that follow, readers are asked to bear in mind that these were not comprehensive surveys, and reflect only species found during the study. Most species noted probably breed in or near the wildlife area for which they are mentioned. Listed status indicates the likelihood of observing the species during a breeding-season visit to the area: common=almost certain to be seen; occasional=should be seen, but in low numbers; and rare=only one to a few individuals present. Detailed maps are extremely helpful in finding one's way in these areas. To obtain them, contact the Ohio Division of Wildlife at (614) 265-6300, or write the same at 1840 Belcher Drive, Building G-1, Columbus, OH 43224-1329.

Crown City Wildlife Area

Location: Straddles the Gallia/Lawrence County line, about two miles north of the Ohio River. State Routes 218 and 790 border the area on the east and north, respectively.

Site Description: Crown City WA has 11,171 acres, and much of the area is open grassland. There are numerous copses of black locust, which are good habitat for species like orchard oriole and blue grosbeak. Scattered small wetlands—some formed by beaver—can be good birding areas. Presently one of the least explored of Ohio's wildlife areas, Crown City is very rewarding not only for grassland species, but also for southern specialties like blue grosbeak.

Species: A total of 84 bird species were detected during the survey period. Those of particular interest included: American bittern (rare, possibly breeding in a large beaver wetland), northern bobwhite (common), yellow-billed cuckoo (common), willow flycatcher (common), white-eyed vireo (common), blue-winged warbler (common), prairie warbler (common), yellow-breasted chat (common), vesper sparrow (rare), grasshopper sparrow (common), Henslow's sparrow (common; any open grassland had this species, and singing males numbered well over 100 in 1999), blue grosbeak (common; probably the greatest concentration of this species in Ohio , with at least 15 territorial males present in 1999, easily found in suitable habitat), dickcissel (occasional; about 12 territorial males in 1999), eastern meadowlark (common), and orchard oriole (common).

Egypt Valley Wildlife Area

Location: In Belmont County, just east of the Guernsey County line. Interstate 70 borders the southern boundary, and State Route 800 traverses the western border. The wildlife area surrounds Piedmont Lake.

Site Description: Egypt Valley contains 14,300 acres of somewhat fragmented, discontinuous land scattered around the west, east, and south sides of Piedmont Lake. This was one of the earliest strip-mines reclaimed; consequently much of the area is in a more advanced state of succession than the other sites. Nevertheless, there are still extensive areas of grassland that harbor many interesting species. This would seem to be one of the likelier sites for Common Raven to be found breeding in Ohio. Piedmont Lake is always worth checking for water birds, too.

Species: A total of 84 bird species were detected during the survey period. Those of particular interest included: osprey (rare), yellow-billed cuckoo (common), willow flycatcher (common), white-eyed vireo (occasional), blue-winged warbler (occasional), prairie warbler (occasional), cerulean warbler (occasional), yellow-breasted chat (occasional), summer tanager (rare), savannah sparrow (occasional), grasshopper sparrow (common), Henslow's sparrow (common), blue grosbeak (rare), dickcissel (rare), bobolink (occasional), eastern meadowlark (common), and orchard oriole (occasional).

Tri-Valley Wildlife Area

Location: Located in Muskingum County, just east of Dresden. State Route 208 bisects the northern half of the area, and State Route 93 borders the southeastern section.

Site Description: 16,200 acres are included in the sprawling Tri-Valley complex, which is the "youngest" of the four sites in terms of reclamation. Indeed, there is still an active strip-mine adjacent to the wildlife area. Consequently, most of this area is open grassland, although some sizeable woodlands are interspersed throughout. Even though Tri-Valley is less than an hour's drive from Columbus, it is relatively unknown to birders, in spite of the interesting avifauna. Like the other areas in this report, Tri-Valley is a good place to observe winter raptors such as rough-legged hawk and short-eared owl. I observed a peregrine falcon here in February 1999.

Species: A total of 90 bird species were detected here during the survey period. Those of particular interest included: bald eagle (rare), northern harrier (rare; one pair probably bred in 1999), broad-winged hawk (rare), yellow-billed cuckoo (common), willow flycatcher (common), white-eyed vireo (common), chestnut-sided warbler (rare; a territorial male was present into early June), prairie warbler (occasional), cerulean warbler (rare), black-and-white warbler (occasional), ovenbird (rare), Louisiana waterthrush (rare), Kentucky warbler (rare), yellow-breasted chat (common), vesper sparrow (rare), savannah sparrow (occasional), grasshopper sparrow (common), Henslow's sparrow (common), rose-breasted grosbeak (rare), bobolink (common), eastern meadowlark (common), and orchard oriole (occasional).

Woodbury Wildlife Area

Location: Located in Coshocton County, about five miles west of the city of Coshocton. State Route 541 runs through the center of the area, and provides good access to the property.

Site Description: Woodbury, at just over 19,000 acres, is the largest of the reclaimed strip-mine wildlife areas. A good diversity of habitat is found here, including grassland, shrub land, woodlands in various states of succession, and small wetlands and ponds. In addition to the interesting summer avifauna, Woodbury is known to support significant wintering raptor populations, at least in some years.

Species: A total of 82 bird species were detected during the survey period. Those of particular interest included: northern harrier (rare), northern bobwhite (occasional), black-billed cuckoo (rare), yellow-billed cuckoo (common), short-

eared owl (rare), willow flycatcher (common), least flycatcher (rare), white-eyed vireo (common), blue-winged warbler (occasional), prairie warbler (occasional), black-and-white warbler (rare), yellow-breasted chat (common), vesper sparrow (rare), savannah sparrow (occasional), grasshopper sparrow (common), Henslow's sparrow (common), rose-breasted grosbeak (rare), dickcissel (occasional), bobolink (common), eastern meadowlark (common), and orchard oriole (common).

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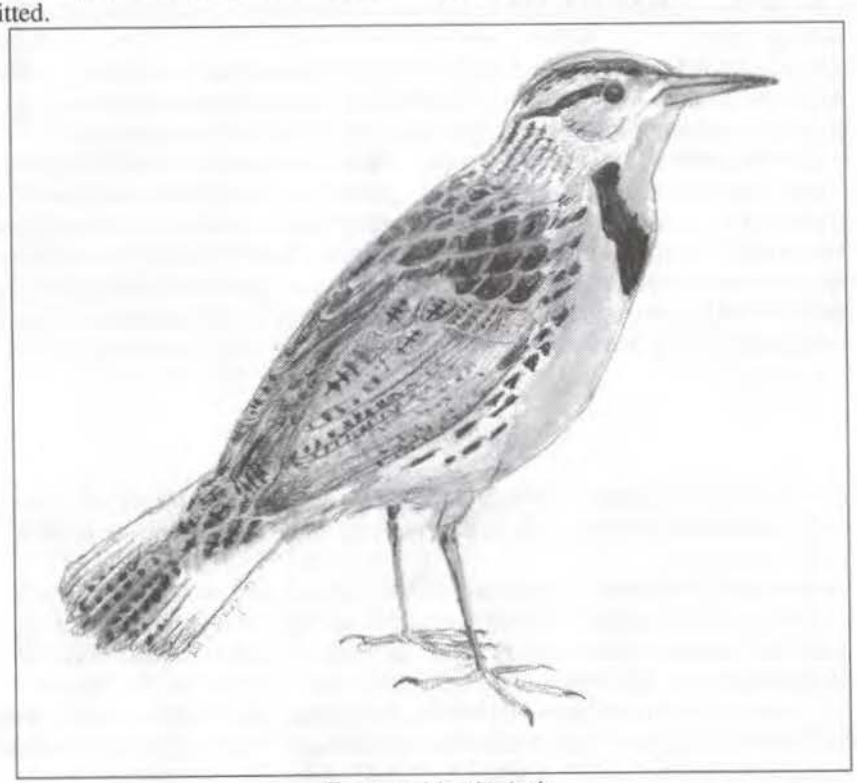

Eastern Meadowlark
by Ben Winger

Red-breasted Nuthatches Nesting at Hocking Hills: The First Records for Southeastern Ohio

by Frank Renfrow

On 12 June 1998 I found a pair of red-breasted nuthatches (*Sitta canadensis*) excavating a hole in a dead red pine (*Pinus resinosa*) at the campground at Hocking Hills State Park, Hocking County, Ohio.

During several subsequent trips I found the pair's attention had shifted to another hole in another dead red pine nearby. Nesting activity was confirmed on 4 July, with the pair going in and out of this hole and making feeding motions, but evidence of young was never definitely established. I did locate several other red-breasted nuthatches in two additional locations near Old Man's Cave during this summer period.

I returned to the campground the next year, on 14 April 1999. I found a male red-breasted nuthatch, and followed it as it busily inspected numerous holes in many dead red pines in the area, including last year's nest hole. I also observed him collecting sap from a small wound that he had apparently made in the base of a white pine (*Pinus strobus*).

I returned to the campground on 31 May, but was unable to find any red-breasted nuthatches. The next day I checked the Old Man's Cave picnic area and the cabin area near the lodge, these being the two other areas where I had found this species the previous year. Just as I was about to give up, I found a male perched on a live red pine in front of one of the cabins. There he was joined by a female, and both were soon busily foraging in the needle clusters in the upper branches of the pines.

I foolishly proceeded to search every dead red pine in the area, only to find the female flying into a hole in the living red pine where I had first seen the male. I then noticed that there were many holes in this tree, some rather large and oblong in shape, indicating the work of a pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*). The nuthatch hole was about eighteen feet up and almost square, possibly also started by a pileated. This

Red-breasted Nuthatches at nest site in Hocking Hills SP, Hocking Co., 3 June 1999. Photo by Frank Renfrow.