

# Occasional Abundance of Certain Birds on or near Lake Erie

E. L. Moseley

*Edwin Lincoln Moseley (1865-1948), science teacher at Sandusky High School and later professor of biology at Bowling Green State University, was a beloved educator whose many publications include Sandusky Flora and Flora of the Oak Openings West of Toledo. These notes appeared in the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report (1899:12-15) of the Ohio Academy of Science. —Ed.*

On the Saturday before last Thanksgiving citizens of Sandusky whose places of business overlook the Bay saw wild swans in such numbers as most of them had never seen before. From the shore near the western limit of the city more than a thousand could be seen at one time resting on the water. The night watchman at the Short Hine dock said they arrived during the night, though another observer saw fifty-six in one string the day before.

This fall was marked by the absence of cold rains and high winds. From the 14<sup>th</sup> of November the weather had been warmer every day than usual at that time of year,—on the 14<sup>th</sup> only three degrees warmer but from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> on an average nine degrees warmer than the normal. This caused the swans to remain rather late in Canada. From Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup> to Nov. 25<sup>th</sup> the wind blew from the north and north-east and so they moved down to the most southerly feeding ground to be found before starting on their long journey to the south. One that was shot proved to be a whistling swan, *Olor columbianus*. Most of them remained but a single day, though some were around as late as Dec. 11.

Mr. August Fettel says that every March many swans on their way north pass to the east of Sandusky, and that in the spring of 1887 when he was working on the pavillion at Cedar Point, he saw “one continuous string of swans flying only thirty or forty feet above the water for two hours. There must have been thousands of them.”

Mr. Dildyne, keeper of the club-house at the West Huron marsh, says he has not seen so many swans before in the fall for ten years but that there were more last spring and he usually sees more in spring than in the fall. Mr. Ritter keeper of the range-light at the entrance to Sandusky Bay, also saw more last spring.

Canada geese appeared in great numbers this fall the same day as the swans. There may have been two thousand of them and as many swans on Sandusky Bay, Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>. Many of the geese were still there Dec. 18; and some may remain all winter, as they did two years ago.

Before sunrise, April 11<sup>th</sup> 1896, occurred a thunder-shower at Sandusky with a warm wind from the south-east. I had seen no yellow-bellied sapsuckers earlier in the season, but that morning they were numerous. Seventy-five, it is said, were seen in a single yard at one time and there must have been thousands in the city. In the country, where I spent most of the day, I saw no sapsuckers. My earliest record for

these birds in 1894, is April 7<sup>th</sup>; in 1898, April 7<sup>th</sup>; in 1895, April 8<sup>th</sup>; in 1891 and 1899, April 10<sup>th</sup>. In 1896 they came with the warm wind of April 11<sup>th</sup>, and stopped in Sandusky for liquid refreshments before attempting to cross the lake. These sapsuckers apparently take no solid food while they are with us.

April 1<sup>st</sup> 1892, Captain Haas was detained on Rattlesnake Island by a dense fog. Wherever he walked he could take but a few steps without starting up a wood cock. About a week later he was on the island again but could not find any of them. The same fog that made it unsafe for him to leave the island had detained the birds also.

The preceding cases are clearly traceable to the influence of the weather. Others depend rather upon local abundance of food.

October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1895, John R. Schacht, whose father is engaged in the fish business in Erie, Pa., wrote me as follows:—“To-day a boat came in with some hundred pin tail ducks [the species referred to is long-tailed duck *Clangula hyemalis* —Ed.] which were caught in the gill nets and drowned. The nets are only five feet deep and rest on the bottom in nineteen fathoms of water. It seems the ducks dive down after the fish and thus get caught in the nets and drowned.

“The fishermen claim that they have caught as high as two hundred ducks in their nets which were in only fourteen fathoms of water. About this week and next is the time when such great numbers get caught and drowned.

“Thought I could mention the above as it seemed very remarkable that these birds dove to such great depths.

“The ducks ere all of this one species—pintail.”

In his next letter he wrote:—“Since writing you about the pintails being caught in the deep water fish net, I have inquired and found out that in the fall of 1893 one tug in one day brought in between 1000 and 1500 ducks. Also have found that they have caught them in thirty fathoms of water.”

In my paper on “The White-headed Eagle in Northern Ohio,” I mentioned the fact that about seventy-five eagles had been seen at one time feeding on the fish which had been caught under the ice in seines and rejected by the fishermen.

Eave swallows, after the young are fledged, may sometimes be seen resting in great numbers on the wires along country roads in the vicinity of the lake marshes. In July 1894 I saw about six hundred together on the wires a few miles west of Sandusky and in 1896 about twelve hundred a few miles east of the city. Mr. Marion W. Bacome recently told me of seeing one time between Bellevue and Fremont a much greater number of “common” swallows than this. There were “at least three birds to the foot for a distance of nearly four hundred feet” and he thinks nine wires, making not less than ten thousand swallows. 