

## Further Afield

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*"Win if you can, lose if you must, but always cheat."*

Jesse "The Body" Ventura

Before he swapped his sobriquet "The Body" for the more parliamentary and dignified "The Mind," and transmogrified himself into the more politically correct and upstanding character of Governor of Minnesota, professional wrestler Jesse Ventura was known for his ostentatious, colorful, and rather unconventional entertainment skills in the wrestling ring. Don't ask me how I know these things—I just do. Anyway, after a lengthy career, health issues forced Jesse out of the ring and over to ringside, where he was able to hone his communication skills as a wrestling commentator. In this role he quickly coined a handful of catch-phrases that served him well; the above quote, which happens to be a personal favorite of mine, is also perhaps his best known expression. Another favorite, but used sparingly, and only when he witnessed a particularly notable in-ring maneuver, was "I'm impressed, and I don't impress easy." Politely overlooking any unfortunate grammar, I think Jesse and I share this trait, and possibly only this trait—we don't impress easy.

Via this admittedly convoluted and blatantly Rube Goldberg-esque segue, we manage again to arrive on the Ohio birding scene, where there is one, and exactly one, Ohio bird book that never fails to impress me every time I consult it. It is the marvelous and astonishing *The Birds of Buckeye Lake, Ohio* by Milton B. Trautman, published back in 1940 as Univ. Mich. Mus. Misc. Publ. No. 44, by the University of Michigan Press. In fact, it might still be available through the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology; you may want to email them to check availability at [fpaper@umich.edu](mailto:fpaper@umich.edu), or call them at (734) 764-0470. If the Museum has run out, the book also appears every now and then on the sales lists of used book dealers. At 466 pages, it is unquestionably one of the finest regional bird treatments I have ever seen. It's really good; you should get one.

Even though Trautman may perhaps be best known as an ichthyologist (his 1957 *The Fishes of Ohio* is another classic), his official investigation of the birds of the Buckeye Lake area commenced on 1 Feb 1922 and lasted until 1 Feb 1934, a period of 12 years. *The Birds* also includes copious earlier details Trautman gleaned from interviews with former residents, market hunters, and sportsmen. Likewise, many significant sightings are also included from 1934 up to the date of publication in 1940. The area covered in the book centers on Buckeye Lake, which lies about 30 miles east of Columbus and includes portions of Licking, Fairfield, and Perry counties. The area is roughly rectangular in shape, and stretches for about 10 miles from west to east, and about five miles from north to south. In total, the area covered

contains nearly 44 square miles of birding territory: a good-sized chunk, but not too big.

So many aspects of the area's birdlife and landscape have changed over the years--- this fact alone makes the book of worthy of serious consideration---but it is truly the painstaking attention to detail that never ceases to amaze me. Trautman himself seems to have been a complex series of incongruities— a specialist and a generalist; an old fashioned, assiduous scientist melded with a broadly interested naturalist; a stern conservationist but an avid hunter; and a cold-hearted and disciplined collector of living things, but a romantic appreciator of everything.

Trautman studied birds in all habitats, in all weather conditions, and at all times of day and night. He kept track of numbers, migrations, and trends, of behaviors, and of nestings. He kept tabs on the food preferences of many species, often with maniacal attention to detail. While his skills of observation are readily apparent, I am also constantly impressed with his *patience* in making these observations-- an area where I am personally woefully inadequate. I know I could never hope to duplicate many of his efforts, let alone approach his accomplishments. And I doubt many of us could.

But rather than simply review a 65 year-old book, I would like to offer a taste of the work in Trautman's own words. I will provide 25 short quotations from the text, but I won't name the species to which they refer. Instead, I'll offer three options; you'll have to determine the correct species through your own knowledge of behavior, timing, abundance, and distribution. Some options are straightforward, others may require a bit of thought or puzzlement, while others are just stupid. The answers will appear at the end of the quiz. All readers who answer 20-25 questions correctly get to keep all the birds on their life lists; those who score below 20 must give away at least three species to less fortunate birders, preferably me. Let's begin with number one:

1. "This dainty little bird was not a habitual fish eater . . . During hazy, quiet Indian summer afternoons little groups of ??? could be seen swimming rapidly in one direction and then another, picking up spiders which had floated over the lake on their gossamer threads and dropped upon the water . . . At such times the females occasionally stopped feeding to give diminutive little quacks, which seemed surprisingly loud in the stillness of the fall afternoons and early evenings."

**A. Bufflehead    B. Green-winged teal    C. Common moorhen**

2. "The ??? was unquestionably the most abundant nesting species of the heron tribe. June censuses indicated that between 40 and 90 pairs nested yearly . . . The species was essentially a cattail marsh-nesting bird."

**A. Least bittern    B. Great blue heron    C. Green heron**

3. "At least a few ??? were seen every winter . . . Sometimes during sleet storms the tails of the birds froze to perches . . . and when they flew away they literally left their tails behind them . . . During a sleet storm on January 25, 1930, I saw a flock of 11 ??? upon the top rail of a board fence. They flushed at my approach . . . It was a

curious sight to see the birds extricate themselves . . . and still more curious to see the 11 tails frozen to the fence.”

**A. Mourning dove    B. Common grackle    C. Brown creeper**

4. “An unusual migration was noted on the early morning of September 1, 1931. While rowing a boat . . . a distance of about 3 miles, I noted 32 ??? at various intervals along the route. All were flying southward across the lake. The large numbers of individuals that evidently were migrating that morning can only be realized when one remembers that so small a bird can be seen only a short distance and that this flight extended over a 3-mile front for a period of more than 2 hours.”

**A. Brown creeper    B. Ruby-throated hummingbird    C. Golden-crowned kinglet**

5. “A survey made on Onion Island, June 9, 1928, revealed 35 nests, of which 5 contained eggs or young, and the remainder were empty ‘cock nests.’ These nests were of the customary globular type, and all except 4 had their openings in the general direction of south or west . . . Since 1928 the openings of 208 nests were observed, and in 161 the openings were south or west.”

**A. Baltimore oriole    B. Sedge wren    C. Marsh wren**

6. “In 1922 no ??? were recorded in the area. In 1929, 8000 were noted in a day. This is the most remarkable change in the status of any bird during the 12-year investigation, and rivals in many respects the spectacular change in the status of Passenger Pigeons in the last century . . . After the close of the investigation in 1934 and until 1936 this species increased in numbers at an astonishing rate, especially during migrations.” [On 10 November 1935, one roost contained an estimated 132,300 birds.]

**A. Brown-headed cowbird    B. House sparrow    C. European starling**

7. “The stomach of a bird collected . . . November 11, 1933, was filled with approximately 1200 lesser duckweed plants (*Lemna minor*), 8 greater duckweed plants (*Spirodela polyrhiza*), 121 seeds of the dotted smartweed (*Persicaria punctata*), 9 seeds of another species of smartweed (*Persicaria* sp.), 3 seeds of hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*), 1 small piece of the carapace of a crayfish, and a few grams of gravel.”

**A. Northern shoveler    B. Common goldeneye    C. Hooded merganser**

8. “At the time of this study, the beloved ‘pa’tridge’ had become only a fond memory in the minds of older men, and the species and name meant nothing to the younger generation of sportsmen.”

**A. Ruffed grouse    B. Greater prairie-chicken    C. Gray partridge**

9. “On August 9 [1930] an incomplete census showed 77 ??? . . . Unlike other herons, this species did not consume large quantities of fish . . . The stomach of a bird collected August 7, 1930, contained 1 small leopard frog, remains of 4 to 6 caddis fly larvae (Trichoptera), traces of at least 5 water striders (Gerridae), 2 marsh treaders (Hydrometra), remains of both damselfly and dragonfly larvae (Odonata), 2 fly larvae

(Diptera), and traces of 2 aquatic beetles (*Hydrophilus*). Besides the food there were 3 quartz pebbles which average 3 mm. in diameter.”

**A. Cattle egret    B. Little blue heron    C. Yellow-crowned night-heron**

10. “[B]y March 10 almost all of the pairs were in their nesting territories. At this season the male was particularly bold and conspicuous . . . announcing by his wild, free scream that he had established nesting territory. The habit . . . was often his undoing, especially during the latter years of the investigation when the so-called ‘vermin campaigns’ had become popular, and the ‘chicken hawk’ was considered a great prize.”

**A. Red-shouldered hawk    B. Broad-winged hawk    C. Chimney swift**

11. “Censuses indicated that there were more than 50 pairs nesting annually between 1922 and 1930 . . . Nineteen nests with completed sets of eggs were observed. Cattail marshes, buttonbush swamps, wet prairies containing coarse grasses, sedges, and bulrushes, edges of marshy pools in swamp forests, and wild rose and blackberry tangles in swampy meadows provided some of the rather diverse habitats in which the nests were situated.”

**A. Red-winged blackbird    B. Common yellowthroat    C. King rail**

12. “Until 1900 the ??? was considered a game bird and was often used in the making of potpies.”

**A. Northern flicker    B. Red-winged blackbird    C. Black vulture**

13. “From the shelter of a duck blind during a violent rainstorm on November 7, 1925, I noticed an unusual gull. To attract the bird I strewed pieces of a partly decomposed channel catfish . . . This appears to be the only record of the capture of this species in Ohio . . . It is interesting to note that for 5 days previous to the capture of this bird, strong northeasterly gales had been sweeping the North Atlantic off the coast of Newfoundland, and traveling southwestward across the country.”

**A. California gull    B. Mew gull    C. Black-legged kittiwake**

14. “Because of the abundance of the bird it was impossible to obtain an accurate estimate of the hundreds of annual nesting pairs. Some conception of abundance was obtained from a nesting census which totaled 218 singing males . . . on June 12, 1928, along 1 mile of lake shore . . . The slowly drawled ‘sweet-cheeuu’ note of this species was one of the most familiar bird songs of the lowlands.”

**A. Acadian flycatcher    B. Alder flycatcher    C. Willow flycatcher**

15. “During the greatest fall concentrations, between September 18 and October 25, the species was more numerous than at any other season, 50 to 500 individuals were daily noted, and occasionally thousands were present . . . The fall transients were found principally in the more sparsely vegetated or close-cropped fields, in short-grass meadows, and in pastures.”

**A. Vesper sparrow    B. Horned lark    C. Lapland longspur**

16. "The ??? was not recorded between 1922 and 1925, but from 1926 to 1934 it was regularly a rare transient and summer resident. More birds were seen between 1930 and 1933 than between 1926 and 1929. This evidence suggests that the species invaded the area during the investigation and that it has been increasing in numbers. This was not true. During the first 4 years of the survey, I was almost entirely unacquainted with this secretive sparrow, its habitat, and song, and I overlooked it entirely."

**A. Lark sparrow    B. Le Conte's sparrow    C. Henslow's sparrow**

17. "The ??? was among the first . . . species to begin its southward migration. The easily recognized flight notes were heard at night and in early morning, as early as June 18-19 (1932). By early July they could be heard almost nightly . . . and in the first half of August the height of the southward movement was attained . . . Only an occasional straggler was noted after September 10."

**A. Yellow warbler    B. Lesser yellowlegs    C. Yellow-rumped warbler**

18. "The ??? was recorded capturing, carrying, or eating food upon 41 occasions, and with 1 exception the food consisted of a mouse, shrew, frog, snake, or crayfish. Once, on June 16, 1928, an adult Meadowlark was taken . . . As the male came over the nest he dropped the lark, and at the same instant the female rose vertically from the nest into the air for about 10 feet, turned on her back, and caught the falling bird in her talons . . . The time taken to eat the lark was 3 minutes and 10 seconds..."

**A. Cooper's hawk    B. Northern harrier    C. American kestrel**

19. "Southbound transients began to invade the area during the first half of September, and the peak of the fall migration was throughout the latter half of that month and the first week of October . . . It was difficult to determine the fall abundance because of the density of marsh vegetation and the quiet, secretive habits of the bird at that season . . . When the marshes were persistently worked, between 25 and 37 birds were seen. On some fall days there must have been 100 to 200 ??? present."

**A. Pied-billed grebe    B. Sora    C. American bittern**

20. "The following characters were used to identify this species in autumn plumage in the field: It habitually fed in deeper water . . . and more frequently immersed the entire head. The flight note was coarser than any notes of the Semipalmated Sandpiper . . . The dusky legs of the ??? had a greenish cast in certain lights, instead of always being black as were those of the Semipalmated Sandpiper or the yellowish green . . . of the Least Sandpiper . . . There was usually some chestnut-red on the feathers of the back, shoulders, wings, and tertials . . . The bill of the ??? appears heavy at the base and is slightly curved downward at the tip."

**A. Dunlin    B. Baird's sandpiper    C. Western sandpiper**

21. "The first ??? recorded in each northward migration during the investigation was seen between March 25 and April 5 . . . Migration was at its height during the last 3 weeks of April, and then as many as 15 birds were noted in a day. In spring

all except a few were found about osage-orange hedges, and the remainder were in hawthorn-dotted pastures and thickets."

**A. American woodcock    B. Loggerhead shrike    C. Bewick's wren**

22. "During the earlier years of the survey I had difficulty in finding fall birds. In 1927 I discovered that they readily responded to the 'Screech Owl' whistle . . . In order to obtain a response from the birds it was necessary to remain quiet for a few moments beside a brush tangle or weedy field where there was a flock of . . . sparrows, and then whistle. After a brief silence, there would be a murmur among the flock . . . When I whistled a few times more, one after another of this species left their retreat, flew upward, and perched prominently . . . with the feathers of the crest elevated to the utmost . . . On a few occasions after whistling I have counted as many as 42."

**A. Lincoln's sparrow    B. White-throated sparrow    C. Grasshopper sparrow**

23. "These birds were most secretive, and since they were present in late spring when the brushy tangles were completely foliated, they were usually extremely difficult to observe. Between 7:00 and 8:30 A.M., however, some males left the dense tangles to perch and sing from small trees or bushes . . . persistently in a loud clear voice for several minutes at a time . . . The males usually sang a single type of song, which I interpreted as 'chip-a-dilly, chip-a-dilly, chip-a-dilly, quoit.'"

**A. Mourning warbler    B. Connecticut warbler    C. Belted kingfisher**

24. "From a blind, on the afternoon of October 31, 1925, I noted a peculiar performance by 2 ???. When first seen, these whitish birds were feeding upon a dark mud flat on which they were very conspicuous. While they were busily engaged in feeding, a large Cooper's Hawk flew overhead. Upon seeing the hawk, the ??? ran quickly into a small patch of snow near by . . . and stood there motionless for several minutes . . . That the birds actually ran into the snow . . . in order to be less conspicuous, is difficult to believe."

**A. Piping plover    B. Sanderling    C. American white pelican**

25. "The peak of migration occurred in August, when a few birds could be nightly heard; during the larger flights dozens and occasionally hundreds were heard passing overhead in a southerly direction . . . The 'puttie-putt-putt' notes of the southbound transients during warm summer nights and early, misty mornings were as appealing and pleasant as the prolonged whistle of the spring birds."

**A. Eastern meadowlark    B. Swainson's thrush    C. Upland sandpiper**

**Answers: 1 B; 2 A; 3 A; 4 B; 5 C; 6 C; 7 A; 8 A; 9 B; 10 A; 11 C; 12 A; 13 C; 14 C; 15 A; 16 C; 17 A; 18 B; 19 C; 20 C; 21 B; 22 A; 23 B; 24 B; 25 C.**

I trust you found a few eye-openers in there somewhere. Buy the book; believe me, you'll find many more. And speaking of books, a new work by Milt Trautman is (posthumously) in the works, being prepared by R.L. Stuckey for publication. Tentatively entitled *The Birds of Western Lake Erie*, I expect it will be well worth the wait. 🦋