

SOME OHIO OBSERVATIONS by W. F. Henninger

By Bill Whan

[Editor's note: The Henninger manuscript from which Bill Whan excerpted the several species accounts in this article was acquired by Carolyn Gooding, of Tampa, FL, at an estate sale. She contacted OOS, who passed her inquiry on to Bill, who wrote this piece. We are indebted to the Goodings for their interest and to Bill for his continuing research into Ohio's ornithological history.]

Walther Frederick Henninger (1873-1929) was an important figure in Ohio ornithology. His contributions to the study of our insects and mammals are significant as well. Born in Missouri, he was trained in Europe by the Moravian Brethren and came to Ohio in 1894 to serve as a missionary for that church, as pastor and teacher in southeastern and northwestern Ohio communities and later in 1921 in South America. He collected a great many biological specimens in all these places, and hundreds of his bird skins are now housed at the Ohio State University Museum.

During his early ministry in southeastern Ohio in 1894, he began contributing ornithological articles – eventually 77 in all – describing the birdlife he studied. Henninger's work with birds eventually led him to serve as president and treasurer of the Wilson Ornithological Society. More missionary and ornithological work in *Seneca* and *Auglaize* was followed by a stint in southern Brazil. In all of these locations he ardently studied and collected birds; his more than 600 specimens from Brazil, for example, now sleep in the OSU Museum.

An early work, "A Preliminary List of the Birds of Middle Southern Ohio," covered the birdlife he studied during his first assignment in Ohio, and was published in 1902 in the *Wilson Bulletin* (Vol IX, No. 3:77-93). This text treats 216 species, each described routinely in a dozen or two words, including times of arrival and departure but with few other details.

This publication has played a deservedly minor role in the history of Ohio ornithology. However, parts of the manuscript of the original work recently came to light thanks to an unknown woman from Marysville, who preserved original drafts, and the Goodings, who recognized their value (and provided some helpful proofreading as well). Some of the more interesting previously unpublished material is presented here.

The handwritten manuscript presents the in-

formation published in the *Wilson Bulletin*, but with many additional details. Readers of this newly-discovered document will gain therefore a clearer notion of some of the birds involved, and well as a better sense of the author's experience and opinions. One might speculate that some of this material was regarded by the *Bulletin's* editor as less than scientific and merely anecdotal, and was thus not published. Along with a better sense of the temperament of the author, however, much was lost of the work's flavor and personal character, as well as the contexts in which discoveries were made.

The manuscript we have is incomplete, and its treatments of eighty-five of the species are missing. Many of the rest of the 216 remaining accounts are not significantly different from the published version, but quite a few have enlightening details well worth reading, and are reproduced below.

The version published in the *Wilson Bulletin* can be read on the internet at <https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/wilson/v014n03/p0077-p0093.pdf> and includes the author's introduction. The accounts which follow are presented verbatim from Henninger's original hand-written manuscript (but for our italicizing the then-current scientific names and the publications), and add much interest to the routine presentations that ended up in the journal article.

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87. *Ceophloeus pileatus*. **Pileated Woodpecker** var. *abieticola*. A fairly common resident in the heavily wooded parts of Pike and Scioto counties. June 7 1897 observed the first time. In some forests as high as 7-8 specimens were seen, but were exceedingly shy.

Some times a person could see several, at other times none whatever at their regular place of habitation. The cutting down of heavy timber for a factory of spokes at Waverly is slowly but surely driving this pride of our woods away. It is indeed a wonder that this bird is still to be found. (*Bulletin Mich. Ornith. Club Vol. II, 3-4, page 39*).

89. *Melanerpes carolinus*. **Red-bellied Woodpecker**. A common resident everywhere. On Sept. 14, 1898, I met a great number of this species, storing up acorns in a forest where all the undergrowth was missing. I did not observe any particularly new actions, they being similar to those of other species, which have the same hab-

itat. I find this species to be a great lover of apples. In July whole families can be seen working on apples, soon after the young have left the nest.

90. *Colaptes auritus luteus*. **Northern Flicker**. A common and greatly increasing resident, especially in Pike Co., where he is almost unmolested, while in Scioto County it is often shot as a game bird. On Sept. 26 1894 I shot a specimen which had in his bill and in his throat four acorns in each, and 5 in his stomach and entrails. I shot one, which had 6 dogwood berries in his intestines, and one undigested with 5 fairly digested ones in his stomach. This bird is also a lover of Pokeberries, one shot on Nov 2 1900 (male) had the whole abdominal region on the in and outside colored with them, while the stomach was full of them. In 1892 during the locust plague in spring I found this bird to be a great destroyer of this noxious insect. I have often watched the peculiar "flirting" habits of this species, so accurately described by Maj. Bendire in his great work, and also those described in the Osprey Vol 1, no. 7 pag. 94-95.

94. *Trochilus colubris*. **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**. Common summer resident. Arrival April 17, 1896; April 24, 1897; May 10, 1898; May 1, 1899; May 7, 1900... On July 30, 1900, I met about 30 hummingbirds, mostly young males, on the side of a levee which was thickly covered with wild flowers; while a number were flying and whirring around the flowers, some were sitting on the blades of corn resting, others again chasing one another with shrill chirping, sounding like "dsicksicksicksicksick," uttered just about as rapidly as their wings were vibrating. Taken altogether it was a very interesting spectacle.

95. *Tyrannus tyrannus*. **Kingbird**...I want to state that the Kingbird does pursue crows at least outside of the time in which he is engaged with raising his family, having observed this in July and August 1900.

103. *Otocorys alpestris praticola*. **Prairie Horned Lark**. After having looked faithfully for Horned Larks for years, I accidentally ran across a flock of 10-12 on a gravelly field, close to the Scioto River in Pike Co., killing one, which proved to be this species. They stayed till Dec. 9, March 21st and reappeared in the spring from March 5 till March 21st...As often is the case, I found them common, where I knew just where to look for them.

104. *Cyanocitta cristata*. **Blue Jay**. Common resident, but very local in its distribution. On May

9 1896 I saw it picking the eggs of a Chipping Sparrow into little pieces, and tearing the nest into tiny morsels in the garden of parsonage at South Webster, Scioto Co. It did not suck the eggs however; it only seemed to delight in the destruction of nest and eggs.

106. *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*. **Bobolink**. Common spring migrant for about one week, generally the first week in May...Sept 8 and 9th flocks of 200-300 migrating over Waverly in the early morning hours.

113. *Quiscalus quiscula aeneus*. **Bronzed Grackle**. Very common summer resident. Arrival: April 8, 1895; March 24 1896; March 8, 1897; March 8, 1898; March 4, 1899, March 5, 1900, Nov. 2, 1900...Two Grackle roosts were observed by me during the summer months of 1900; principally was my attention turned to the one in the midst of the town of Waverly in the Water Street Park at the Canal. The Grackle roost was just across from 3 hotels, but the birds were seldom molested by the people. This roosting place first came under my observation on July 8th. The first birds, that would come in every evening were solitary ones; they began to come in at 4 p.m. when the days became shorter, from 15 to 20 minutes earlier. The rest would come in bunches of 3, sometimes 4, flocks of 50 to 200 in short intervals. Sometimes they were disturbed and many would circle around for a long time before settling. In the morning the last ones would leave at 5 a.m.—this grackle roost was of great interest to any bird lover. During the year 1900 it has become the custom of many wealthy young people in Chillicothe to shoot the "black birds" when they go to roost of an evening, as they are considered "fine eating." As laws in this country are written for all, but never used against the wealthy, they go unpunished; who would want a wealthy man for an enemy for the sake of a "blackbird" or such a trifle as shooting inside of the city limits!

117. *Poocetes gramineus*. **Vesper Sparrow**. Common migrant, fairly common summer resident...I have heard this bird sing, when the cold would make a person shiver and long for the fireside.

120. *Chondestes grammacus*. **Lark Sparrow**. This finest songster of the N. A. Sparrows is rather rare, but constantly on the increase in the hills of Scioto County. Not observed in Pike Co. Summer resident.

127. *Peucaea aestivalis bachmanii*. **Bachmann's Sparrow**...See enclosed note as published in the Bulletin of the Michigan Ornithological Club

Vol II, no 1, Jan. 1898, pag. 7-8. Since then Mr. H. C. Oberholser has written me, that though my record is the first published one of Bachmann's Sparrow in Ohio, there is a still earlier, but yet published record for the State. [A clipping from the Michigan Ornithological Club, "Bachmann's Sparrow in Southern Ohio" is pinned to this page. It describes the discovery of a singing Bachman's in the hills near South Webster on 23 April 1897. Henninger shot the bird, but while it could not be prepared as a specimen, he was able to compare it closely with a specimen. He had heard another at the same location on 06 May 1896. He was to learn that his was Ohio's first record of this species, until the belated publication in Jones's The Birds of Ohio (1903, p. 103) of a specimen collected in Columbus on 18 Aug 1890.]

128. *Melospiza fasciata*. **Song Sparrow**. Very common, strongly increasing resident. I have noticed and ascertained by actual measurement that those Song Sparrows that come in from the north, in December principally, are somewhat larger, especially wing and tail, and darker than the resident Song Sparrows. The difference though is too slight to warrant any subspecific recognition or as the late Dr. Coues would have said, "there was probably not the sufficient exposure to the sunlight" to call for a subspecies.

145. *Lanius borealis*. **Northern Shrike**. Rather rare winter visitor. Oct 8 1895, Oct 6 1899, Dec 24 1899, Jan 23 1900.

154. *Mniotilta varia*. **Black & White Warbler**. Fairly common summer resident. Arrival April 23 1897; April 28 1898; shot one July 26, 1900. On May 6 1899 observed one bathing in a small spring, an interesting spectacle; at times the bird would almost disappear in the water, throwing up a continuous spray with its wings and tail, both about half opened and spread out fanlike.

161. *Dendroica tigrina*. **Cape May Warbler**. Found it a common migrant in upland beech woods...I believe this bird is generally more common than it is thought, but during migrations confines itself to certain places just like the Philadelphia Vireo.

168. *Dendroica castanea*. **Bay-breasted Warbler**. A very common fall migrant. Mr. H. C. Oberholser's remark under this species in his "Birds of Wayne Co, Ohio," referring to Dr. Wheaton's statement can be easily explained. Had Mr. Oberholser read Dr. Wheaton's remarks thoroughly he would have noticed that this species loves the tops of the tallest trees, while the Blackpoll Warbler

may be found everywhere. Only once I saw a Bay-breasted Warbler in the lower branches of a tree, Sept. 24 1898 at Piketon. Have shot them out of trees 80 to 100 feet high.

169. *Dendroica striata*. **Blackpoll Warbler**. The most abundant migrant of all the Warblers. Found everywhere.

173. *Dendroica vigosii*. **Pine Warbler**. Rare migrant and I also have the pleasure of recording it as a rare breeder for the first time in the State of Ohio. On Aug 5 1898, while out on a short stroll with the Prof. of the Waverly High School, we met on a little hillock in tall timber without any undergrowth close to the Canal a company of 5-6 warblers. One of them was giving a few little notes, reminding a person of the Chipping Sparrows. My companion shot one of them, which I embalmed, it being too much torn for a skin; At home I identified it as a Pine Warbler and Mr. H. C. Oberholser was so kind as to verify this determination. The bird was a male still partially in first plumage, which showed that it would not have traveled far from its home at that age. Pine trees can be found in the northeastern part of Pike Co. in the western tract of Jackson Co. and along the Ohio River in Scioto Co. Yet close to Waverly there are no pine trees, except those used as ornamental shrubbery—observed Oct 8, 1894.

182. *Icteria virens*. **Yellow-breasted Chat**. Exceedingly common summer resident... On Jul 26, 1900 I witnessed a peculiar performance of this bird. I heard a noise, sounding almost like the notes of a magpie in a cornfield. To my surprise there was a bird hopping on the damp ground, spreading its tail and swaying from side to side, much like the Redstart does in the tree tops. I shot the bird, a female now in my collection. I have never read anything concerning such an action of this species. The Chat is also a fine singer at night; often have I listened in Ohio to the Chat's vocal powers, where only the moon and the stars gave light, where only the murmuring brook and the lay of the [illegible] accompanied it and it led my thoughts back to those nights when I heard the nightingale's sweet song in the bushes, or when the Treelark poured its melody over the sterile sand and wild heath of Silesia, enjoyable to the tired hunter and the roe of the forest.

188. *Mimus polyglottos*. **Mockingbird**. Very rare summer resident. But once observed by myself.

194. *Troglodytes hyemalis*. **Winter Wren**. Common winter resident in very cold winters. Nov.

11, 1894. All winter 1898-99 from Oct 27 1898 till Mar 1 1899. One shot on Oct 27 1898 in the collection of Prof. W. M. Clayton.

195. *Cistothorus stellaris*. **Short-billed Marsh Wren**. Accidental. One shot Oct 17, 1894 by Mr. Wm. Leive at South Webster, Scioto County in a deep cut in an upland cornfield. Having been killed with a load intended for a rabbit, it was too mutilated to stuff it, but still allowed identification.

Hypothetical List

Carduelis purpureus. [**Purple Finch**]. I believe to have seen this species in Nov 1898, but had not a gun with me to secure specimen.

Falco columbarius. [**Merlin**]. I believe I have seen this hawk here at Waverly, but my shot missed the bird.

Grus canadensis. [**Sandhill Crane**]. This bird is very likely a migrant through this part of the State.

Charadrius dominicus [**American Golden-Plover**]. Probably observed in Sept 1899.