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SOME OBSERVATIONS AT WEEDSEED INN.

BY ALTHEA R. SHERMAN.

Not every person who enjoys the companionship of birds is permitted to go a-field every day, or even once each week. The majority of us must be content the greater part of the year with the bird study obtained in our own dooryards. It is the purpose of this article to refer to some of the bird items noted at Weedseed Inn. The latitude of this inn is that of 43° north. Its longitude is nearly that of 91° west from Greenwich, which locates a spot of prairie land six miles from the Mississippi River and one mile and a half from the timber belt that borders that river. This bird hostelry covers a space of three acres, which embraces an orchard, meadow-land, and a portion of a ravine. The latter in spring and autumn is wet enough to entertain some of the water fowls.

Beginning with January the weather for six weeks is usually too severe and the location too exposed for the inn to entertain many birds. Until the last of December Blue Jays have usually called almost every day, and occasionally a Hairy Woodpecker has stopped for a meager lunch, and a mild spell has brought out a few Juncos. But the winter of 1903-4 was an exception. Chickadees came often and pecked at some suet hung out for them. Flocks of Redpolls came several times and bird music was furnished by a Northern Shrike that called often and announced his presence with one of his squeaky airs. Plum trees full of thorns, and a meadow full of mice with but little snow on the ground made Weedseed Inn a favorite caravansary for him. He was often seen impaling a mouse on a

thorn, and the hindquarters of his prey were some times found in the trees after he left.

Toward the last of February the call of the Prairie Horned Lark comes up from the adjoining fields, and it is not long before our Robins and Phœbes return to us. None of our birds have ever been marked, but a neighbor had a male Robin that "the fool with a gun" deprived of a foot. This bird with his mate for two years has nested in her yard. Will another spring-time bring him back is a problem soon to be solved.

We feel very certain that some of our birds return year after year. Several Phœbes stay about for four or five weeks, but at nesting-time it is but one pair that remains to occupy the old nest in the barn that has been the birthplace of so many Phœbes. A crack in the flooring above the nest affords a fine opportunity for observing Dame Phœbe's method of raising a family. She does a little refitting of the nest every spring, and on an early day in May lays her first egg. Every morning thereafter between five and nine o'clock an egg is added to the clutch until five jewel-like treasures are to be found. It has been a source of interest to notice the variation in the periods of incubation; that some broods remain longer in the nest than others; that sometimes eight and again ten days elapse from the time the nest is deserted by the first brood before Phœbe lays the first egg of her second set. To watch her five little ones go to bed night after night on the lowest branch of an apple tree has been an interesting experience. Mr. Phœbe must have taken these young ones to another summer resort, since they disappeared from Weedseed Inn about the time Mother Phœbe began her second sitting.

For several years this hostelry has been the home of a pair of Brown Thrashers. They arrive very early in May, and about the middle of that month the first egg is laid. For the past two seasons their first nest for the year has been in a lilac bush about fifteen feet from the house; the same nest being occupied both years. Possibly they might feel that "the world is out of joint" if no human being peeped into their nest each day.

Then there is the Flicker's hole in the barn. It has been there a long time, for it is remembered that he is now a large lad who as a little fellow once asked, "Doctor, where do the

Woodpeckers go when they go in the barn?" The hole gives entrance to a nesting-place four by fifteen inches with a depth of eighteen inches. This space is covered by a removable board in which is a peep-hole commanding a good view of the interior, a rare place for observation. The question of each year is "What bird will take possession of the Flicker's hole?" English Sparrows certainly will if not watched and routed. Sometimes a Flicker raises a brood there, another year a Wren will raise two broods in one summer. The favorably located nests of Phoebe, Flicker, Wren, and Brown Thrasher have each yielded sufficient topics of interest for a story by itself.

Many of the common birds nest about the place, but their nests are not always found. One year a Bob-white had a nest containing fourteen eggs not more than ten feet from the plowed ground of the garden in which people worked daily. Unfortunately a mowing machine ran over the spot and destroyed the nest before mankind discovered it.

During migration days Weedseed Inn entertains its share of guests. Early in the spring one may look for a day now and then when a pair of Hermit Thrushes spends the whole day here, moving about until the gathering gloom of night hides them from view, but they are never seen the following day. On other days the maple trees are covered with Rusty Blackbirds, enough to fill four and twenty pies, and the air is stirred with music, enough to fill a whole country side. For about a week in both spring and fall a dozen or more of Wilson's Snipe prod and paddle in the marshy spots of the ravine, and the question arises, "Are they not the same birds that tarry each season?" One spring day comes to mind when the trees fairly swarmed with warblers. I then had little experience in naming the birds and could identify but few of them.

The hour in which I identified the greatest number of birds was from 7:30 to 8:30 o'clock on September 24, 1904. Almost all of them were seen from one window. The birds observed there were the Flicker, Phoebe, Blue Jay, English Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Meadowlark, Philadelphia Vireo, Bell's Vireo, Myrtle Warbler, Palm Warbler, Brown Thrasher, House Wren, Chickadee, Bluebird and Robin. A few minutes after half past eight Vesper Sparrows and a Brown Creeper were seen, but a Catbird that nested in

the yard during the summer did not appear until later in the day. Add to this list of nineteen the birds seen during the six previous days of the week which were Black-billed Cuckoo, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Baltimore Oriole, Goldfinch, American Redstart and White-breasted Nuthatch. This lot for one week was equalled in number on May 25, 1904, when twenty-six species of birds were observed at Weedseed Inn. They were Mourning Dove, Flicker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Kingbird, Phœbe, Chebec, Blue Jay, Bobolink, Cowbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Meadowlark, Baltimore Oriole, English Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swallow, White-eyed Vireo, Maryland Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Brown Thrasher, House Wren, Catbird, Bluebird, Robin, and another which could not be satisfactorily named.

Early rising and a day devoted to observing the birds would, no doubt, secure a much longer list of bird guests for one day at this bird hostelry. A list of seventy-nine species named and many others that were not identified suggests in a limited degree what has been seen in one yard by a tyro in the dooryard study of birds.

BREEDING HABITS OF PARULA WARBLER (*Compsothlypis americana usneæ*) IN NEW JERSEY.

BY MARK L. C. WILDE.

Parula Warblers are very common during the breeding season, in suitable localities, throughout the lower half of the state of New Jersey. Commencing at Brown's Mills, on the Rancocas Creek, situated in Burlington county some fourteen miles east of Mount Holly, and journeying southward to the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, these birds can be found breeding on the edge of all swamps, streams, lakes, ponds, and mill dams, where there is a fairly good growth of that bearded lichen (*Usnea barbata*), which many of the south Jersey men deign to call "Beard-Moss."

While the climatic conditions, to a very large extent, may be responsible for the presence and growth of this so-called "Beard-Moss," one thing is certain, and that is, this lichen absolutely controls the distribution of the Parula Warbler, as