



Books For Banders

"SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW"

Edited By Mabel Gillespie



Your book editor has enjoyed a very pleasant summer vacation thanks to Michael J. Thomas and Grace Coit Meleney whose surveys of recent books appear in this issue. Your editor does promise, however, to do some work herself for the final 1965 issue. There is one very important phase of bird study that hasn't been considered yet. But there are going to be many issues in coming years that will welcome audience participation.

Book Review EBBA

Although separated by half a century in time and by an ocean in space, two naturalists have given to our language works which are read as classics.

Gilbert White lived in England from 1761 to 1793 nearby a village whose natural history he documented in letters to two friends. "The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne" published in 1789, has since its first edition, been one of the most frequently republished works in the language. It was my first reading after I became interested in ornithology, for the wise grownup who had sparked the interest when I was fifteen recommended White to me. I read the book and discovered the world of nature that surrounded me and which had passed me by. The book is available in the Everyman series (\$1.95). If you are like me and take White very seriously, you will look for an older edition, and then probably do as I do, collect him. (If you happen to be sitting on an early edition that is accumulating dust, the writer's address is at the end of this note!)

One learns from the "Natural History" what a good naturalist should be, constantly questioning what one sees, the nature of constructive inquisitiveness. White was the first to realize that the name Willow warbler was being used to name two birds that looked alike but had different songs and for a third bird that looked like the other two and which usually turned up in quite different habitats. He had in fact identified the three species of leaf warbler, willow warbler, chiffchaff and wood warbler. No one had done so before. He was the original discoverer of the noctule bat, the harvest mouse and the lesser whitethroat. His life history of such birds as the nightjar and the swift are a model of what a life history should be. But let me not take any pleasure away from those who have not yet read him.

On this side of the Atlantic another diarist of literary stature was to publish fifty years after Selborne appeared, a book that will

live as long as America, Henry David Thoreau's "Walden." Thoreau-files will be delighted to know of a new publication "Thoreau on Birds," edited by Helen Cruickshank, published by McGraw-Hill (\$7.95). The editor has drawn from all of Thoreau's works for her book, excerpting exhaustively his ornithological observations. The book makes fascinating reading. Thoreau had an advantage over White, for he could draw upon several important ornithological reference works published between 1800 and 1850, including Wilson, Nuttall and Audubon. Thoreau was thus able to accumulate an impressive species list, given at the end of the book.

The reader will find much careful recording of things seen, as well as things heard. For example, Thoreau transcribed the Fox Sparrow's song 'twee twee twa twa ter twee twa,' which may be considered at least as useful as Peterson's "variable arrangement of short clear notes and sliding whistles!" Above all perhaps it is the use of language which makes both Thoreau and White so timeless. Note the simplicity of language in these observations, and also the poetry. "The bluebird carries the sky on his tail." "How indispensable are our one or two flocks of geese in spring and autumn...What would be a spring in which that sound was not heard!" "I see at a distance a kingbird or blackbird pursuing a crow lower down the hill, like a satellite revolving around a black planet."

This book is not just another edition of Thoreau. For the serious ornithologist, Mrs. Cruickshank has provided an indispensable guide through the many works of Thoreau, and if for nothing else deserves our gratitude for discovering this observation made in 1837:

"This curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient, more beautiful than it is useful; it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used. The order of things should be somewhat reversed; the seventh should be man's day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow; the other six his Sabbath of the affections and the soul,--in which to range his widespread garden, and drink in the soft influence and sublime revelations of Nature."

That seems to me to be the basis for that Great Society we are talking about.

-- Michael J. Thomas

John Kieran: An Introduction to Birds
Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1950 \$4.50

77 pages, 100 birds in full
color by Don Eckelberry

In reading this delightful book, one feels as though he were taking a walk with the author and listening to his chatty stories of birds 'in order of their abundance in our fields, woods and dooryards.' Since the book largely describes eastern birds, one has to take a mental air-hop when suddenly on p. 37, the Cactus Wren shows up and again when on p. 44 the Yellow-Headed Blackbird, Western Tanager and Bullock's Oriole appear.

In many descriptions delightful phrases are used: the ruby of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet is not often seen 'because it is like the red flag on a taxi-meter; it only goes up when the operator puts it up.' Or the Cedar Waxwing 'must be the most polite bird in all the world,' followed by a description of rows of cedar-birds on a branch 'passing berries from bill to bill up and down the line.' Wood duck 'feed mostly on vegetable matter with some occasional aquatic insect for dessert.' The description of the Road Runner has to be read to be enjoyed.

In several places good comparisons of similar species are drawn as with the Sparrows, Gulls, Terns, Egrets and Mergansers.

I would take exception to one statement: 'In the spring the bill of the male (Starling) is yellow.' That holds true for both sexes, I believe.

The descriptions and drawings are very much better than the colors of the pictures in which there is a super-abundance of sky blues, greens that should be gray, blacks that are verdant greens (as in the Black-crowned Night Herons or purple brown as in the head and neck of the Canada Goose. Illustrations of the Mourning Dove, Redstart and Great Blue Heron would be thoroughly confusing to an amateur for whom the book is ostensibly written. Nevertheless, the book is well worth owning.

--Grace Coit Meloney

THE BIRDS OF CAPE COD, MASSACHUSETTS by Norman P. Hill, M.D.
William Morrow & Co. N. Y. 1965 364 pages. Illustrated with photographs
and pen and ink sketches. \$6.00

For the bird student of Eastern Massachusetts and especially The Cape, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, this book seems a 'must.' The book is similar to, but much larger than "Birds of Martha's Vineyard" by Ludlow Griscom and Guy Emerson printed privately in 1959. The 'many volumes of notes' containing vast amounts of field work on Cape Cod by Ludlow Griscom from 1929 until about 1955 and which are to be deposited in the Peabody Museum, Salem, Mass., are the 'backbone' of the Systematic list which is the main part of the book. Mr. Griscom, it may be remembered, for a long time held the record for seeing the greatest number of species of birds in a year in North America.

This book has an attractive paper dust cover with an air-view of the Cape, and very clear endpaper maps. The Description of the Area is good and gives the scientific names of the plants involved. The Ornithological History is divided into three periods: 1620 to 1865 when the Cape was quite inaccessible except by boat or walking; 1865-1912 the Sportsman-naturalist period, or the rise of scientific ornithology. At this time railroad travel on the Cape made the territory available not only to hunters who added to the museum collections, but also to the commercial.

collectors of tern and other feathers who quite decimated certain species. Many men, such as Thoreau wrote of their visits at this time. The third period, from 1912 to the present is the age when automobiles and even beach buggies get people all over the place. But this period has also been a time when field ornithology has risen to the dignity of a science. Griscom (1890-1959) kept his careful notes, the Oliver L. Austins had their Ornithological Research Station where they banded by the thousands, concentrating especially on tern colonies. Their place is now owned and managed by the Massachusetts Audubon Society as the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. Henry Beston wrote his "The Outermost House" which has now been made a National Monument at Nauset. And just recently the long eastern beach has been set aside as the Cape Cod National Seashore Park.

The Sources of Data for this book are: 1) Museums at Harvard, Boston, Salem, Chicago, New York, Lincoln, Mass. and Wellfleet Bay; 2) Banding records of the Austins, Elizabeth Burbank and others; 3) Field Notes of Brewster (1870-1905), Griscom, Stanley Cobb, Osborne Earl, John Bishop and the author, Norman P. Hill; 4) Published books (a good bibliography is found at the end of the book); 5) Magazine articles of reported birds. These latter are taken with caution.

The Outline of Treatment is very thorough. For each species in the Systematic List the following are given wherever possible: Status; Seasonal Occurrence, spring, summer, fall, winter and also earliest arrival date, average arrival date, counts, average departure dates, latest departure date; Distribution, pastures, moors, shoreline traps; a well documented History; and some mention of sub-species. As to numbers reported, the author often says, "This may represent increase in observation rather than a true increase in occurrence."

The last chapter, Ornithological Summary is an excellent gathering in of all the vast body of information and would be well worth the reading for any lover of birds to whom Cape Cod is accessible or not. The statistical section lists 354 species recorded with 30 other species listed as hypothetical. Sections on breeding and wintering contain much discussion on weather on the Cape. The general warming tendency here in the North has brought some changes in species. The section on Migration brings out the great difference between the 100 species migrating in the spring as against the 200 species in the fall. Due to the nearness of the large body of the Atlantic, which takes a good part of the summer to warm up, the springs are late and cold and the fall periods are long and warm, and the prevailing north-westerlies cause one of the great passages of bird life on the outer beaches, leading as they do along the Atlantic Coast or over the ocean to the Carribean. Much of the Cape was deforested by the early settlers who needed the cleared land for farms and the wood for fuel. These clearings were followed by meadows and later woodlands and have caused constant changes in bird populations. Some birds, like the gulls "are probably only recapturing long-lost territory." An increase in general interest and knowledge of birds, with more food put

out for them, especially in winter, is another factor in the changes in breeding and wintering habits of birds.

For bird-banders this book is well worth owning.

--Grace Coit Meleney

DECOYS FOR MIST NETTING

By J. A. Hardman

Catches of waders in mist nets at dusk, or all through the night on a moonlight night, can be considerably increased by setting out decoys in the water just on the upwind side of nets. The decoys serve both to bring down lower any birds flying over and to cause those birds intending to land to pitch in with the decoys and thus be intercepted by the net placed slightly downwind.

Silhouette-type decoys, made of wood or hardboard, can be used, but they are not so effective as proper stuffed decoys. The latter, however, are expensive to buy, or tedious to make, and, in any case, do not stand up at all well to repeated handling in watery places. A simple and effective means of making a decoy from any dead bird which is picked up is to inject it with concentrated formaldehyde (formalin). This causes it to dry up or mummify if it is placed in a warm place for a few weeks. It does not smell and has an advantage over stuffed birds in that it is considerably more robust.

The dead bird should first be set up in a wire jig designed to keep the head, body and legs in the required positions. The head, each muscle and the 'insides' should then all be injected with formaldehyde (about 10-20 ccs. will suffice for the whole bird). Dispensable plastic syringes can often be obtained from doctors or chemists. Wash off any solution which gets on your hands, as it can irritate. When the bird is dry and hard, remove the wire jig and tie thicker wire supports to the legs so that these project 3-6 ins. below the feet. These will serve to hold the decoy steady when set.

Similar decoys can also be used to induce birds into the catching area of clap nets. (Reprinted from the Ringers' Bulletin)



Answers to QUIZZ on page 223 -- 1, William Shakespeare. 2, Agnes Repplier. 3, Beecher Bowdish. 4, Matthew Prior. 5, George M. Cohan. 6, John Milton. 7, Thomas Stearns Eliot. 8, Edward Lear. 9, Plutarch. 10, Roland Young.