

BALTIMORE ORIOLES AT HAWK MT., PA.

By Maurice Broun

The books tell us that the Baltimore Oriole is a bird of farmlands, orchards, villages. We would not dispute this. Perhaps our experience with this charming member of the blackbird tribe has been somewhat unusual.

Prior to 1961 the Baltimore Oriole was a migrant only, at Hawk Mt., appearing regularly in small numbers. In the spring we were used to watching Orioles join with other birds in concerted attacks on cankerworms.

And so, when a pair of Orioles built their nest in the top of a tall oak by the roadside, at Sanctuary headquarters, in the midst of our mountain wilderness, in May, 1961, it was indeed a novelty, and we were filled with pleasure. The nesting was successful, and the family of five birds (three youngsters) was a lively addition to our community of summer birds. It should be added that this pair of pioneer nesting Orioles were 1st-year birds. In late May the adults were banded; and in July, a single young Oriole was banded.

We rejoiced, in May, 1962, to have the "pioneers" back with us, along with the aforementioned banded youngster. By mid-summer at least 12 Orioles were attracted to our feeders, containing a generous supply of donuts. But the Orioles also exhibited a great appetite for Japanese beetles, making such inroads on the pests that few beetles were in evidence the following season.

In 1963 our population of Orioles was static: some 12 birds at most, including the original 1st-year male, 27-131166.

In 1964 only two pairs of Orioles were present, so far as we know, and these produced successful nestings despite a violent windstorm in mid-June which destroyed all other arboreal nests of the birds in the area. A total of 8 birds (2 entire families) comprised our Oriole population this season.

On May 8 and 9, 1965, in cold, raw weather, more than 30 Orioles, most of them in full adult male plumage, crowded the feeders from dawn to dusk, putting on a tremendously exciting, colorful show for all our visitors. All but 8 Orioles had departed by May 10.

In late May a serious irruption of cankerworms was ably checked by many birds including 6 pairs of Orioles. Two pairs nested along the highway, the rest in the woods. One of the highway nests was hung in the exact location of the original, 1961 nest.

In June, Orioles in loud concert were the dominant avian feature at headquarters; streaks of orange flashing all over the place. So

great was the activity at the feeders, as the parents brought their youngsters in, that nearly a full box of donuts disappeared daily. By mid-summer at least 28 Orioles (all but 4 were duly banded) thronged the feeders and among these birds was the female of the original pair - 27-131167, now in her 5th year.

The "population explosion" of Baltimore Orioles at Hawk Mt. in recent years ties in with the general population expansion of other Icterids. Our Orioles may be filling an ecological niche formerly occupied by warblers and vireos. The latter have suffered enormous reduction in numbers, locally, since 1954.

Route 2, Kempton, Pennsylvania



WILSON O. S. ANNUAL MEETING

The 1966 annual meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society will be on the campus of the Pennsylvania State University, April 29 and 30, in the J. Orvis Keller Building (new Conference Center behind the Nittany Lion Inn.)

A symposium on "The Present Status of our Birds of Prey" will be part of Saturday's program. The four paper sessions, banquet, special events and field trips are open to all interested people.

Local chairman: Merrill Wood, 312 Life Science Building, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa. 16802.

