

# MARYLAND BIRDLIFE

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## NESTING OF GREAT HORNED OWLS

On April 29, 1945, about 3:30 P.M. as we were driving along at the intersections of Cowpens and Providence Roads, Mr. Herbert Strack noticed moving objects in a dead tree about twenty feet high and about fifty yards from the road. We immediately stopped and investigated and found it to be the nest of Great Horned Owls with three young. Billy McHugh found a Towhee that evidently had been brought by the parent bird for food. Mr. Crowder took a picture of the one that was perched on the highest point while the two younger sat motionless in their nest. By the crows making such a noise and darting back and forth, we surmised the parents were nearby.

On May 5, Willard Strack and I stopped to see and note the progress. At this time two of the young were perched on the highest point. We found parts of a rabbit under their nest. We could hear sounds that resembled a dog barking but knew it must be a parent owl giving a warning signal.

On Friday, May 11, Mrs. Kent and I went out to see them. Nearby was a Gas and Electric truck but the men had not noticed the owls. They became very much interested in them also. We regretted very much not having a camera or field glasses at this time for the birds were so active and the positions were perfect for taking pictures.

On Wednesday, May 16, Mr. Strack, Mrs. Kent, Willard and I went again at dusk and found one of the baby owls had fallen from the nest and was backed up against the base of the stump with his wings outspread as if to attack. Patiently we moved closer and stroked his head, then Mr. Strack got him to get on a limb and he carried him about and then lifted him to a tree limb about eight feet from the ground. About a week later we went again but they had flown.

Mrs. Herbert P. Strack

## AN EARLY SLATE-COLORED JUNCO

A Slate-colored Junco (Junco hyemalis) that I saw in Hallsdale Park, Baltimore, early on the morning of September 24, 1944, was an earlier fall arrival than any I can find recorded for Maryland — although Cooke, in "Birds of the Washington, D.C., Region," notes a September 14 arrival in an unstated locality. The bird I saw was so dark in color that it must have been an adult male. No more Juncos were seen in that area until October 8, at which time the real fall movement began, very lightly.

. Hervey Brackbill

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## A FLOCK OF EVENING GROSBEAKS

On November 15, 1945, while working in the alley in the 1700 block between Bolton Street and Linden Avenue, a chorus of unfamiliar bird calls attracted our attention to a flock of about 50 Evening Grosbeaks. The birds flew in from the south, alighted in the top of a leafless elm tree for a brief minute and then, in waxwing fashion, flew on uttering their shrill calls. The golden-brown plumage and conspicuous white wing patch made their identification unmistakable.

Evening Grosbeaks are irregular winter visitors in the Baltimore area. November 15 appears to be an early date for their appearance in this latitude; it was a clear, cold day, the first such day after a rather warm, rainy week.

John T. Emlen, Jr. & David E. Davis

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## AN OSPREY 150 MILES AT SEA

An Osprey (Pandion haliaetus) that alighted on the combar cutter Mendota about 150 miles off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and stayed with the boat until it docked at Curtis Bay, Baltimore, on September 24, 1945, was pictured on the vessel's radar screen in the Baltimore Evening Sun two days later, along with an account of the incident. In that picture the bird is too small to be identifiable; however, there was also taken a close-up photograph of Mendota crewmen holding the bird, underside forward with wings spread, and in this photo it is instantly identifiable. To substantiate this record of occurrence a copy of the close-up has been obtained for the Maryland Ornithological Society. The newspaper article is not specific, but

apparently the bird came down on the ship September 23.

Pearson, Brimley and Brimley, in the 1942 edition of "Birds of North Carolina," page 103, note that an Osprey that had been banded at Orient Point, Long Island, New York, was shot while attempting to alight on the mast of a ship 73 miles east of Cape Hatteras on October 9, 1933.

The account of the Mendota bird given the Evening Sun by the ship's crew said the Osprey was on the mainmast when first noticed, and spent four hours there. Then it moved to a radar fire-control unit aft, and a crewman captured it. Taken down to deck, it remained completely docile and after being photographed and measured — wing-spread  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet — still stayed on the boat when released. Moved to a different perch after another hour, it did finally fly away, but soon was back on the mainmast again, and there spent the night. On the morning that the cutter docked (apparently the following morning) the Osprey was still there. When it left is not known.

Hervey Brackbill

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#### TWO ROBIN NESTLINGS FED OPPOSITE ENDS OF SAME EARTHWORM

A nest of Robins that I was watching in Baltimore held three blind, downy young four days old when, on July 5, 1943, the male parent arrived on one feeding trip with an earthworm about 4 inches long. The three yellow mouths gaped upward, and into one of them he thrust one end of the earthworm, and then put the other end in the mouth of a second bird!

At once each nestling began gulping its end; in a couple of seconds the two were bill to bill, then their bills were interlocked and they began to thrash around in the nest in their efforts each to go on swallowing the worm. Shortly one so far succeeded that it had a good part of the other's head in its cavernous mouth. Next they worked into a jowl-to-jowl position, facing opposite directions, and continued their tossing about, all the while watched but in no way aided by the parent that had got them into their fix.

After two minutes had passed, the female arrived. She fed the third nestling; the male flew away. And now the female watched as the worm-linked pair tumbled about, again biting bills and heads. At last the little birds seemed to reach the limit of their strength; both heads flopped down in the nest. But in a little while they were lifted up again and the struggle was resumed.

Now, however, the female arrived at a solution of the problem. Whenever her youngsters presented an opening, she pecked at the portion of worm that showed inside their mouths, and after five minutes

she succeeded in cutting the worm in half. That was eleven minutes after it had been given to the birds.

Writing in the Passenger Pigeon, the bulletin of the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology, for February, 1941, Alvin L. Throne has described the similar feeding of an 8-inch Red-bellied Snake to two Hermit Thrush nestlings by the female parent. Those birds were linked for more than half an hour, and were finally freed when the male pulled the tail of the snake out of the gullet of one nestling.

Hervey Brackbill

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### MIGRATING BLACKBIRDS

On November 27, 1945 the writer was in transit from Camp Myles Standish, Mass., to Fort Meade, Md. Just before sunset, when the light was already much diminished, the train was in the vicinity of Newark, Delaware. At this point large flocks of blackbirds were first observed streaming across the sky, and, as the journey continued into Maryland across Cecil County nearly to the Susquehanna River additional flocks were seen from time to time. The form of the flocks was most interesting. The birds were moving in long, very wavy lines which extended in the same general direction as the line of flight. The ranks were not more than a half dozen yards wide but the flocks stretched out for miles, almost as far toward the horizon as the eye could make out the birds. The sinuous lines were constantly but slowly wavering back and forth into new undulating patterns and at a distance the flocks appeared like streamers of smoke drifting across the sky. The birds flew rather high and the train was moving swiftly but it could be easily determined that the great majority of the birds were grackles (Quiscalus).

If these were migrating flocks, the direction of flight was rather puzzling, for all were headed northward or somewhat west of northward. There is a possibility that the birds were moving out of a tidewater feeding area to roost in the uplands, which would not be unexpected in the case of crows, but which seems rather the reverse of the usual fall movement habits of blackbirds. Or, it may be, that the flocks, after travelling southward along the west side of the Delaware during the day, had glimpsed the broad waters of the Chesapeake toward evening and had turned back to avoid a night crossing.

Haven Kolb

## EDITORIAL NOTES

Our bulletin has been consistently late in appearing. Several factors contribute to this unhealthy situation. It has been suggested that Maryland Birdlife be made a quarterly instead of a bi-monthly, thus concentrating effort at fewer times when, perhaps, greater energy can be expended. Some similar journals publish only when sufficient material has accumulated without regard to a definite time interval, though in many cases such a policy leads to early extinction. We should like to hear your opinion on this subject. Be prepared to express it at the February and March meetings. If you cannot attend these meetings, write us a letter!

Whatever the form decided upon for the 1946 volume, we shall still require material. Not ten percent of the membership has yet been heard from in these pages. The present number illustrates the use and interest involved in short notes which everyone can collect and write up for the enjoyment and instruction of us all. With the publication of this number we have no further material at hand for the next ~~one~~. The editor is loathe to call again upon the writers who have served us so well in 1945.

On November 15, 1945 in New York Dr. Frank M. Chapman died at the age of 81. Probably no other man had more to do with the present widespread interest in the living bird, and so it is particularly fitting that bird clubs such as ours should note his passing with regret. To some of us, though we never met him, he was, through the medium of his books and his editorship of Bird-Lore, a guide, counsellor, and friend in our embryonic birding days. If your enthusiasm for birds needs reconditioning, now would be a good time to read or re-read Dr. Chapman's Autobiography of a Bird-Lover.

H. K.

### MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Organized April 9, 1945

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