

MARYLAND BIRDLIFE

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HERMIT THRUSH WINTERING AT BALTIMORE

A Hermit Thrush (*Hylocichla guttata*) that appeared along Gwynns Falls after a snowstorm early in 1945 stayed, in a very restricted area, through at least 29 days of the winter's coldest and snowiest weather. It was first seen January 21 and last seen February 18; the next search, February 25, and all later ones were vain. The thrush disappeared shortly after another snowstorm; however, depletion of the honeysuckle berries that were its principal food seemed the likely cause of its departure, rather than the weather.

The temperature reached the winter's low of 11 degrees F. early in the bird's stay (January 25), and on five other days during this period went as low as 15 to 18 degrees. As for snow, on January 16 there had been a 7-inch fall, and because of the cold much of the ground remained covered with snow and ice through about February 8. The thaw that then followed was ended on February 17 by another 3 1/2 inch fall. The thrush, incidentally, apparently had no aversion for the snow, but sometimes hopped about over it.

The thrush was first seen, January 21, in a thicket on the upper edge of Dickeyville. When next found, January 31, it (the species' extreme rarity in this vicinity in winter seems to justify the assumption that this was the same individual) was at the place at which it made its principal stay. This was a flat field on the right bank of Gwynns Falls about 500 yards upstream from Dickeyville. The flat is perhaps 100 yards long and 75 deep and is crossed toward its upper end by a little run. Along the Falls, it is broadly bordered by a dense growth of saplings and briars, and similar growth extends up the run. On the other three sides tall woods, with much underbrush and honeysuckle, clothe the rising land. The flat itself is dotted with dense thorn trees, and for the rest bears a weedy growth of shoots and saplings some of which are thinly draped with honeysuckle.

The upper end of the flat, in the vicinity of the run, where the honeysuckle berries were most plentiful, was the thrush's chosen place, and there it was always found within an area about 50 yards in diameter. Aside from feeding, its chief observed occupation was sunning; its perches for this were sometimes on bushes, once about 12 feet above the ground on the lowest limb of a big oak,

and once about 20 feet up, near the top of a sapling. Occasional low "chuh" or "chih" calls were the only vocal utterances heard.

The only observed food was honeysuckle berries. These seemed to be its principal food, for on three of the five occasions that it was watched it fed upon them, and in one period of about ten minutes' steady feeding it must have eaten 20 or 30. It always swallowed them whole. The berries were not over-plentiful, and in its feeding the thrush flew about actively from vine to vine in search of them. Usually it plucked them while perched on the vine or the host sapling, but once I saw it pick one from the wing--in much the fashion of a hummingbird, but heavily and not with the hummer's finesse, it fluttered before the vine in a practically vertical position while snatching off the berry.

Hervey Brackbill

BIRD TRIP TO THE PATUXENT WILDLIFE REFUGE

On Sunday, April 14, 1946, we made a most interesting tour of the Patuxent Refuge under the capable and efficient leadership of Mr. Robert E. Stewart. While waiting for the other members to arrive, we were shown skins of some of the unusual birds collected on the Refuge, thus whetting our appetite for the trip to come.

The day was pleasant and sunny and we started out with high hopes of some interesting observations. In a short time Mr. Stewart had us all peering through our glasses at the diversified bird life and it wasn't long before our notes began to grow. Along the way, we saw many wildflowers and shrubs and our trip was highlighted by the sight of a stand of birgin beech and the largest overcup oak in the country.

After lunch, Mr. Stewart showed us some of the charts and records of the studies in which he is engaged. Of particular interest were the maps of nesting populations on the Refuge outlining the territory of each breeding pair.

The birds heard (H) or seen during the day were as follows:

Great Blue Heron	Flicker
Common Mallard	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Wood Duck	Hairy Woodpecker
Ring-necked Duck	Downy Woodpecker
Turkey Vulture	Phoebe
Red-tailed Hawk	Purple Martin
Red-shouldered Hawk (H)	Crow
Osprey	Carolina Chickadee
Bob-white	Tufted Titmouse
Killdeer	White-breasted Nuthatch
Woodcock	Winter Wren
Wilson's Snipe	Mockingbird
Mourning Dove	Robin
Barred Owl (H)	Hermit Thrush
Belted Kingfisher	Bluebird

Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Migrant Shrike
Starling
Myrtle Warbler
Pine Warbler
English Sparrow
Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird
Rusty Blackbird

Purple Grackle
Cardinal
Purple Finch
Goldfinch
Savannah Sparrow
Wesper Sparrow
Junco
Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow

Most of the birds listed above were found singly or in pairs, although in the case of the Wilson's Snipe, we were rewarded by the efforts of several hardy souls who braved the bull pen to flush about 18 of these birds from the madow. The Rusty Blackbirds were observed in a rather large flock as was also their naturally gregarious cousin, the Red-wing. As we were about to leave the Reserve, our attention was directed to a bird sitting on a wire which was identified by a consensus of opinion as a Migrant Shrike. This interesting observation was the ornithological highspot of the day for most of us and seemed a fitting conclusion to an already intensely interesting tour of the Refuge.

We all wish to thank Mr. Stewart for his most willing and helpful guidance in our behalf and hope that another walk will be forthcoming in the near future.

Gorman M. Bond

THE SEASON

December 15, 1945 to February 15, 1946

Since we announced our purpose to present this department we have seen several copies of The Wood Thrush (see Notes and News) to which Chandler S. Robbins has been contributing excellent summaries of the bird movements in a wide region around Washington. Drawing from the notes of many active observers, Mr. Robbins gives a much more complete picture than we can hope to construct for our northern part of the State. Nevertheless, it seems desirable to continue with our plan, hoping that such a report may, at least, stimulate in our region more observation.

December was somewhat colder than normal and there was a little more snow than is usual in that month, but about Christmas the cold broke and mild winter weather with considerable rain ensued. Before the end of the period under review there was more freezing weather but little snow, so, on the whole, the weather was in no way extraordinary. The birdlife of the period was equally normal.

After the report of Evening Grosbeaks by Emlen and Davis in the fall (Maryland Birdlife 1:24) everyone was naturally on the lookout for them but additional reports did not begin to come in until the middle of February; Mr. Brackbill is preparing a comprehensive report on the invasion in this area. We could dig up no reliable information on the occurrence here of the Snowy Owl, which

also is said to have made another southward incursion this winter.

A single Great Blue Heron was seen several times in January at Chase by Crowder but none were noted above the tidewater country. On Jan. 10 a flock of 350 Whistling Swan was on the Gunpowder above the Pennsylvania Railroad bridge and others were present in Days Cove and on Otter Point Creek from that time on (Crowder). Despite the heavy ice on Loch Raven three Black Ducks and a Mallard were found there on Dec. 23; they were feeding on small running streams tributary to the lake. Some open water persisted in the middle of the lake even in the coldest period and, as usual, American Mergansers remained in these fishing holes all winter (Kolb). This species was also seen occasionally throughout the period in Back River (Crowder).

Passerine birds seemed to be present in usual numbers. (Hampe reports Bluebirds throughout the winter at Halethorpe. A few Myrtle Warblers wintered at Loch Raven.) Robins were unusually scarce at Loch Raven during the winter, though there was no noticeable food scarcity; Crowder reported none in the Bird River district until Feb. 10 when 14 came in, apparently early migrants. Before the end of the period returning spring was evident in other ways. The first full song from a Cardinal was heard at Govans on Jan. 31. By Feb. 2 Carolina Chickadees were singing vigorously at Loch Raven. An extensive performance of the territorial sparring match of Mockingbirds was observed at Govans on Jan. 26.

All members in the Baltimore area are invited to contribute notes which will tend to show the progress of the ornithological year.

Haven Kolb

AT THE FEEDING SHELF

(See Notes and News, p. 13)

A Purple Finch on the shelf paused in its feeding to scratch its head. To perform this act it dropped one wing down and away from its body a bit, and then thrust the foot on that side up between the wing and body and across its shoulder. That is the way all of the passerine--or perching--birds commonly execute this act. But the Woodpeckers, among other types, keep their wings closed and reach directly up to the itchy spot.

At Dickeyville the usual winter visitors to above-ground feeders are the Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Cardinal, Carolina Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, English Sparrow, Blue Jay and Mockingbird in about that order of frequency. Occasionally a Song or White-throated Sparrow appears at these feeders, but usually these birds keep to the ground, as do Juncos. During much of the past winter, flocks of Evening Grosbeaks and Purple Finches have been unusual visitors. Sunflower seed, raisins and suet are the usual foods put out.

Wash and dry the seeds from your cantaloupes this summer and use them on your tray along with sunflower seeds. Their drying isn't much trouble and they are eaten by Cardinals, Purple Finches-- probably by all the birds that take sunflower.

To the envy of a neighbor, a Mockingbird fed regularly at Mrs. Dorothy Teawalt's shelf in Govans. To the envy of Mrs. Teawalt, the neighbor was attracting a handsome male Cardinal oftener than she. So they made a bargain: Mrs. Teawalt would use no more raisins on her tray and the neighbor would omit sunflower seed. Shortly each had the bird she preferred.

Hervey Brackbill

PIGEON OBSERVATIONS

The breath taking sight of a flock of pigeons wheeling and turning in split second precision has often distracted me from my work in my fourth floor office. These pigeons normally stay up for one or two minutes before settling down again under the eaves of the building opposite me.

The other day, however, I noticed a behavior which was quite new to me. There was a flock of perhaps sixty pigeons flying in close formation and then close to them (but never actually in their formation) were four others, each flying his own course. After several minutes there was a sudden turn and ten pigeons broke off from the original flock and started to circle and turn in the same area, but never seemed influenced by the larger parent flock. A few minutes later another ten birds broke off from the large flock but each of these flew off on its own course. There, in a circle of no larger than a hundred yards radius, were flying two flocks and a dozen single birds. For a full five minutes I watched them before having to leave. The flight of the single birds was almost like that of night-hawks in search of insects. During those five minutes there were no further changes in or out of the two flocks. One wonders what stimuli set off these split-second separations, following which the individual birds seemed to lose all interest in the flocks.

Allen W. Stokes

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

As provided in the constitution, officers for the Maryland Ornithological Society were elected at the March meeting which was held at 2103 Bolton Street in Baltimore on March 8, 1946. President Hampe had appointed a Nominating Committee at the January meeting and the slate as announced by its chairman, Mr. Fladung, at the February meeting encountered no opposition, so that, by unanimous vote of the members present (about twice the necessary quorum), the secretary was instructed to cast one ballot for each of the names on the ticket.

Consequently our officers for the year 1946-47 are as follows:

President: Mr. Orville W. Crowder
Vice-President: Mr. J. H. Passimore
Secretary: Mr. Haven Kolb
Treasurer: Mr. Herbert P. Strack

Additional Executive Council Members:

Mr. Irving E. Hampe Miss Pearl Heaps
Mrs. Herbert P. Strack Miss Florence H. Burner
Mr. Andrew Simon

NOTES AND NEWS

Mr. and Mrs. Allen W. Stokes attended the XI Annual North American Wildlife Conference in New York on March 11, 12, and 13. One of the highlights was a courageous address by Albert Day, successor to Ira Gabrielson as Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. He pointed out the dangers of inaccurate publicity about certain conservation groups. He holds each group responsible for the publicity given it. He singled out Ducks Unlimited as an example and mentioned the widely read article "Quacker Comeback" which appeared in a recent issue of Readers Digest. In this article all credit for the restoration of waterfowl was given Ducks Unlimited despite the excellent work of the Canadian government, our Fish and Wildlife Service, and, most important of all, the gentle hand of Providence which held off dust storms and droughts during the past five years. This article and a book by the same author on the same subject has brought about increased demand for less stringent shooting laws. Actually the duck population has dropped off in the past two years despite the war and now, with increased hunting pressure, most conservationists feel that the season should be reduced to thirty days from its present eighty days.

Conservationists applauded Day for a full minute in recognition of his strong stand on this subject.

A.W.S.

The observations that can be made at a feeding shelf are limited in character, but they are by no means lacking. It is proposed to make "At the Feeding Shelf" a regular page in Maryland Birdlife, with the items composing it contributed by all of our members who operate shelves. It is not necessary that all of the items in any one issue come from the same person; Mr. Brackbill has done the whole series this time merely as a starter--to give the idea. What birds are you attracting? What foods or stratagems do you use? What incidents have you seen? Send us one note or several--short or long--chatty or profound--we'll group them into a varied page.

At a meeting of the Executive Council held on March 21, 1946 the incoming president, Mr. Crowder, appointed the following chairmen of the standing committees as recommended by the Nominating Committee in its report:

Program: Miss Pearl Heaps
Membership: Mrs. Herbert P. Strack
Field Trips: Miss Florence H. Burner
Publication: Mr. Haven Kolb
Records: Mr. Irving E. Hampe

Membership in these committees is still open. All who desire to serve should communicate with the president. The completed committee lists will appear in our next issue.

At the end of the first year our membership has doubled its numbers and every sign points to continued rapid growth. President Crowder announced at the meeting of April 12 that plans are under way for a real State-wide organization with members in all the counties. To accomplish this it will be necessary to enlarge Maryland Birdlife and make it a living organ of the Society. We hope to be back on schedule with respect to publication date by the middle of the summer. It is up to our members, however, to furnish us with interesting and stimulating material if we are to have a better bulletin.

In exchange for Maryland Birdlife our Society receives the publications of the Lancaster County Bird Club (Bulletin), the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia (The Wood Thrush), the Brooks Bird Club (The Redstart), and the Virginia Ornithological Society (The Raven). These publications are available at all of our regular meetings and at other times in the Bird Department of the Natural History Society of Maryland

There has been no membership list published since that naming the charter members. With our members now more than doubled it has been decided to produce a comprehensive list as of June 1, 1946. This list will appear as a supplement to the present issue of Maryland Birdlife. Members who find any errors in the list should communicate with the secretary.

H.K.
