

MARYLAND

BIRD LIFE

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THE SEASON

May, June, July, Aug., 1948

Cool, rainy weather in the opening week of May delayed the May migration peak until May 10-12; departure dates for many transients were also postponed into late May and early June by the absence of any heat wave in the latter half of May. June and July brought slightly higher temperatures than normal, but a cold snap on Aug. 6 accelerated the early fall migration. The next three weeks brought gradually increasing temperatures, but due to the absence of cool nights, no major land bird flight took place; most species of transient warblers were represented by only a few early stragglers.

Hérons. One of the most interesting events of the late summer was the post-breeding wandering of southern herons. Although American and snowy egrets and little blue herons are normally found through most of tidewater Maryland from early July on, the numbers seen this summer were above normal in many areas, particularly inland. In fact 1948 saw the greatest northward movement of egrets into New York and New England of this century. W. B. Green found 3 immature little blues along Conococheague Creek on July 17, his first record for Washington Co. On July 25, Green and others saw 5 or 6 American egrets in that county. At Sandy Point, where this species is seen regularly in much higher numbers, J. E. Willoughby counted 71 on July 17. On the same day he found 3 snowy egrets at Sandy Point, and on the 18th Fern Bell saw 3 of the latter species at Edgewood. Snowies were found regularly thereafter throughout tidewater Maryland, with high counts of 19 at Sandy Point on Aug. 8 (J. W. Taylor), 20 at Fairhaven, Anne Arundel Co., on Aug. 25 (D. M. Thatcher), and 55 on Assateague Is., Aug. 14 (Stewart, Buckalew, and Springer). Louisiana herons again appeared as far north in Chesapeake Bay as Sandy Point, where 3 were recorded on Aug. 8 (Taylor) and again on the 22nd (E. G. Davis).

Shorebirds. Sandpipers and plovers deserve particular comment during the present period, partly because so few observations on Maryland shorebirds have been recorded prior to the past few years, and partly because nearly the entire spring migration of this group, as well as the fall migration of most of the adult birds comes in the four months under discussion. John Willoughby found a piping plover's nest with 4 eggs at West Ocean City, May 17; although this species nests regularly in small numbers along the coast, few actual

nesting records are available. This year for the first time, the Wilson's plover was seen regularly in late May; the first breeding record for the State was established on the weekend of June 26-27 by the D. C. Audubon Society; and the species was seen through Aug. 8 (Barnes). Once again the black-bellied plover and ruddy turnstone were found at Sandy Point (Aug. 8, Taylor).

A very early solitary sandpiper was seen at Patuxent Refuge on July 12 (Stewart). A peak count of 162 willets was made on Assateague Is. on Aug. 14, and another record for the Western Shore was established on Aug. 22 at Sandy Point (Davis, Taylor, et al.). Although the purple sandpiper does not arrive until November, it remains regularly into May. Willoughby's daily observations in the Ocean City area from May 15 to 24 showed that the last individual left on May 15; this is the latest spring date recorded for Maryland. Buckalew, Stewart and Springer visited Assateague Is. on Aug. 14, and reported an unprecedented count of 126 stilt sandpipers in addition to a Baird's sandpiper, 220 pectoral sandpipers, and 2 marbled godwits. Buckalew found 2 individuals of the still rarer Hudsonian godwit south of the North Beach Coast Guard Station on July 17, an exceedingly early date. The most interesting find of the entire period was an adult male ruff, a straggler from the old world, which Buckalew has recorded in the Wood Thrush (4:22). Other sandpiper records of interest include 6 dowitchers seen on June 27 at Ocean City by Myron Elliott (first mid-summer record); and a western sandpiper found at Sandy Point on July 18 by Robbins (earliest fall arrival for Maryland). A red phalarope seen off Ocean City on Aug. 21 (Springer, Low and others) and a northern phalarope found on Assateague Is. on Aug. 14 by Buckalew and party, are early dates.

Flycatchers, Wrens. For the second time the least flycatcher remained at Patuxent Refuge well into July, though no evidence of nesting was found (Llewellyn). Two late winter wrens were seen at Seneca as late as May 8 by many observers. Young Carolina wrens just out of the nest were found from May 8 at Loch Raven (Kolb) to Aug. 8 at Cabin John (Thatcher).

Warblers. With no one reporting regularly from the Eastern Shore, and with visitors to that area from other parts of the State concentrating their efforts on water birds, we know comparatively little about migration dates and relative abundance of the rarer transient warblers east of Chesapeake Bay. Therefore, the following records of warblers seen by Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby along the Pocomoke River near Willards are of interest: blue-winged on May 19 and 20, myrtle on May 15, Blackburnian on May 20, chestnut-sided on May 19, 20, and 23, and northern water-thrush on May 20 and 22. Late spring records from other parts of the State included a blue-wing at Loch Raven on May 22, black-polls still common there on June 5 (Kolb), and northern water-thrush and Wilson's warbler at Patuxent Refuge on May 28. Cerulean warblers seen at Patapsco State Park on Aug. 19 (Hampe) and at Glen Echo on Aug. 18 (N. Jenison) are close to the latest departure dates from these parts of the State.

Orioles, Sparrows. Richard Cole reported that a Baltimore oriole which arrived in Towson on May 9 started building on the 10th; the young left the nest on June 18. Highlight of E. G. Davis' trip to Sandy Point (Aug. 22) was the discovery of an adult lark sparrow--the third record east of the longitude of Baltimore. C. S. Robbins

OCEAN CITY - MAY 22-23

Having reached the Hastings Hotel in Ocean City on the preceding evening, twenty people started a full weekend of birding under the leadership of Chandler Robbins by rising at five on Saturday morning for a visit to the headwaters of the Pocomoke River in hope of finding Swainson's Warblers. The caravan of five cars entered the river swamp just below the Delaware line on a narrow country road barely above water level.

Warblers were calling all about. High hopes were raised when our leader heard a Swainson's singing near the road, but the bird remained merely a voice. Though the warbler was close the standing water filled with roots and brush made any effort at surrounding him impossible. Strolling up the road, Robbins and others distinguished the songs of some sixteen or seventeen species of warblers, of which only a few could be seen. Many of the party were interested in a yellow-throated warbler, which was pursued for some distance in a drier area at the edge of the swamp.

After breakfast at the hotel around nine o'clock the party set out to locate a horned lark's and a piping plover's nest found near the West Ocean City slough by John Willoughby, who had spent the previous week at the shore. As soon as the party reached the described area the lark appeared and settled down on the nest within twenty-five feet. The eggs were found to be hatching. Leaving the nest to be photographed by Eleanor Robbins the group studied the slough, which had the usual shore birds and terns. Then some of the party found the plover's nest, with four eggs, on a large mound apparently left by dredging.

A somewhat muddy trip to the far side of the slough produced little of special interest until it was decided to look for nests of boat-tailed grackles in a dense clump of bushes. After one false start, a colony of grackle nests was discovered with green heron nests almost intermingled. In an area of dry grass, on the way back to the ford across the slough, Mrs. Clark Webster flushed an unidentified bird from a well concealed nest containing four large dark olive eggs of shore-bird type. After some discussion, it was concluded that the nest belonged to a pair of willets flying around somewhat disinterestedly at a considerable distance.

Returning to the autos, the party drove a short distance north of Ocean City, where a nesting colony of least terns was inspected, and what was believed to be another lark's nest was discovered. A few miles further north lunch was eaten on the beach.

After some further driving along the shore, the party went to the Pocomoke at Willard's, staying until about sundown. Good views were had of prothonotary warblers and most of the other species of birds inhabiting the area, as well as of some migratory warblers and of herons flying overhead. The abundance of cuckoos of both species was striking. On the return several cars turned south a short dis-

tance west of West Ocean City to listen for cluck-wills-widows, which were heard in numbers with some whip-poor-wills.

On Sunday morning an early short trip to West Ocean City produced definite verification that the nest on the far side of the slough belonged to willets. The nest constituted probably the second recorded for the county. It was also discovered that the piping plover's nest had been robbed of three of its four eggs.

Around nine o'clock the party embarked for Assateague Island on a boat operated by Capt. Harry Bunting, who proved to have an extensive, if non-technical, knowledge of local birds. Landing was made by rowboat, somewhat south of the shorebird flats, which were approached slowly by way of the outer beach because the tide was unfavorable. Reaching the flats about noon, we found them almost bare of everything except small sandpipers. Red-backed sandpipers, which were abundant and in high plumage, interested some of the party. Near the flats a large red fox gave us an excellent, if rapidly receding, view and we also found two herds of island ponies and one of cattle. A number of the ponies had very young colts, whose tracks in the wet sand, always close alongside their mothers', made an attractive pattern.

We had barely finished lunch at our landing spot when Capt. Bunting arrived for the return trip. At his suggestion we decided to stop at one of the tern islands in the bay. By forcing the bow of his boat against a bar, Capt. Bunting enabled us to wade ashore. The terns were found to have laid few eggs, though nest scrapes were numerous. Seth Low discovered a willet's nest, and Chan Robbins, by patient search of the crowd of terns overhead, picked out a gull-billed tern, which was probably the high-light of the trip to many participants.

After the return to Ocean City, the party broke up, each car finding its own way back, though actually several met at the ferry. Here Chan Robbins pointed out a blue grosbeak, singing on a conveniently located wire.

The total number of species recorded for the trip was 134 (?), of which perhaps twenty were listed on calls alone. Most of the list was first made on Saturday, only about half a dozen species being added on Sunday.

Elting Arnold

PUBLICITY UPSTATE: We are constantly receiving clippings of excellent articles on the activity of the Society's branches in Allegheny, Washington and Frederick Counties, and it is good to know that newspaper cooperation, sometimes difficult to obtain in Baltimore, is going strong under the local leaders. Just at hand, for example, is a fine article from the Frederick paper, telling the whole story of the organization of the Frederick County branch on April 17. This organization meeting, by the way, took place in the open beside the Monocacy River, in the course of a field trip. No fireside birders, these Frederick people! Mrs. Mabel Hoyler's aggressive bird enthusiasm doubtless accounts for the good press relations there.

C L U B E V E N T S

May - June, 1948

JUNIOR TRIP, PATAPSCO VALLEY, MAY 1. Second of our Baltimore Junior trips drew attendance of 31, swarmed over Relay area, saw 56 species, watched a gnatcatcher build a nest and an oriole start one.

"BIRD DAY", MAY 8, BIG SUCCESS. First attempt to get members to make field trips of their own, note birds and report, resulted in participation of 178 members, who reported on 15,000 birds of 190 species. Lists ranged across the state, reflected wide interest.

PATAPSCO VALLEY TRIP, MAY 9. The annual Hampe-Bowen trip to lower Patapsco Valley found 77 species, including dozens of "firsts" for the year and many life-list-new birds for the 31 members who attended. The barred owl young were waiting for us again, and 16 warblers found places on the day's list.

CATOCTIN CONFERENCE, MAY 14-16. First statewide meeting and field trip shattered all expectations, drew 114 people, taught all sorts of nature subjects, ate stupendous meals at insignificant cost (we cooked and served over 400 meals!), and went home tired, happy and all set to make the affair an annual one.

CROWDER AND GARDEN CLUBS, MAY 18. President Crowder, aiming at cooperation with garden club people throughout the state, accepted speaking engagement before meeting of presidents of state's Garden Club's at Baltimore Country Club luncheon, spoke informally and was besieged with requests for individual club talks. Our good member, Mrs. Weldon Kilmon, arranged the talk and is helping keep birds in their deserved prominence with the Garden Clubs.

WORTHINGTON VALLEY FIELD TRIP, JUNE 5. The long-promised trip with Brooke Meanley to see his upland plovers was a grand treat. Not only plovers, but bobolinks, horned lark flights, cliff swallow nests, many other attractions featured this splendid trip.

ALLEGANY JUNIOR LEADERS AT PAW-PAW, JUNE 5-6. Wonderfully successful investment in the future, Allegany leaders operated a week-end training camp for junior bird enthusiasts, who proved they can spot nests with eagle eyes. Mr. Crowder helped.

GARRETT COUNTY TRIP, JUNE 11-13. Second visit to the rich highlands of the state found more thrills in the way of nesting northern species. Fifteen members spotted 68 species.

WOODSTOCK, JUNE 20. The Newells' annual cerulean-warbler trip along the Patapsco delivered the goods, ate lunch and repaired to Worthington Valley for a follow-up on the birds discovered on June 5 trip. Upland plover still singing.