

# MARYLAND BIRDLIFE

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## SOUTHBOUND

A wild dusk, and a wild wind  
 And high on the air the raucous cry,  
 Where the racing, wind-tossed clouds are thinned,  
 And the wild geese fly:  
 A clamorous clanking chain that takes  
 Its way through a night of threatening rain,  
 And woe to the quivering link that breaks  
 That feathered chain!

I stand tiptoe to catch the last  
 Faint flicker of light on a flying cloud,  
 And though the trembling line has passed  
 There comes the loud  
 Insistent voicing of south-bound birds:  
 "Come with us, Come with us, Come!" and I  
 Who would go if I could, can find no words  
 To answer that cry.

Grace Noll Crowell  
 (In Flower & Feather, Chattanooga  
 Audubon Society, October 1950)

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# THE SEASON

May, June, July, and August 1950

May 1950 will long be remembered for its extraordinary abundance of migrant passerine birds. The first indication that central Maryland was to be deluged with unprecedented numbers of a great variety of transients appeared on May 6. On that date, dozens of observers, covering their home territories, noticed an exceptional variety of birds, and recorded very high counts of many species. Instead of May 6 being the peak day of the May flight as was first suspected, each subsequent day proved equally interesting and brought continual changes in the abundance of the various species. Some species which were recorded in record-breaking abundance on May 6 increased two or three times on subsequent days, while others gradually declined. For twelve days the great flight continued unabated, then slowly decreased. Observers who had been afield for only one day during this period recorded larger numbers of transient warblers than they normally see during the entire month. The flight was quite local in distribution, being most pronounced from Washington County east to Anne Arundel and Harford Counties, and northward into Pennsylvania. In southern Maryland and on the Eastern Shore, conditions were close to normal.

The initial flight on May 6 can readily be explained on the basis of a damming up of belated migrants to the south of Maryland, which descended upon us when high temperatures and southerly winds lifted the weather barrier which had caused the hoardes of northward travelers to delay their flight. The factors responsible for the continued prevalence of such numbers of transients in our area are not completely understood. Certainly the large amount of cloudiness which resulted in marked scarcity of eighty degree temperatures throughout the month was a contributing factor, as it tended to reduce the urge for northward flight. But this does not explain why there continued to be a daily influx of such proportions from the South.

The summer was favorable for nesting activities: a bit dry in June and locally so in July, but with no floods until late in the summer; few and local wind storms; no temperatures above 97° (for the first time in 30 years); and no high tides of destructive proportions. Both July and August were cooler than usual, July especially so. A cold snap on Aug. 13-14 which caused the mercury at Oakland to dip to 36° sent the summering Yellow Warblers on their south-

ward way and gave the first real impetus to the fall land bird migration.

Loons and Grebes. An interesting record of the Common Loon was reported by William B. Green, who found a single bird on May 4 at Edgemont Reservoir, one of the few records for Washington County; it was still present on the 6th (Dr. and Mrs. R. S. Stauffer). Pearl Heaps found another one at Druid Lake in Baltimore from May 18 to 21. A Horned Grebe at Gibson Island (Mrs. Vera Henderson) on June 2 is the first of a long list of record-breaking late dates. Another late grebe record was a Pied-bill at Druid Lake on May 25 (Miss Heaps).

Gannets and Cormorants. Nine Gannets which were seen by dozens of observers on the May 20 trip to Ocean City are the latest ever recorded in Maryland. Summering Double-crested Cormorants are less common in Chesapeake Bay than along the coast, but Judge and Mrs. Henderson saw 5 on July 7 at Bloody Point on Kent Island, and 2 on Aug. 25 at Poplar Island in Talbot County.

Hérons. Spring records of the American Egret were obtained Prince Georges and Anne Arundel Counties, and a single Spring Snowy Egret was found at Middle River on May 2 (Edwin Willis). The only spring report of a Little Blue Heron north of its breeding colonies was an individual seen at Patuxent Refuge on June 1 by Kenneth Laub. The northward wandering of southern herons in late summer was a great disappointment this year, as all species were scarce and largely restricted to tidewater.

Geese and Ducks. Although May is not regarded as a waterfowl month in Maryland, 16 species were recorded during that month, and 7 were observed at record-breaking dates: a Brant at Ocean City on May 20 (Robert Stewart), a drake Ring-necked Duck at Patuxent Refuge on May 6 (Robbins and Paul Springer), a Canvas-back at Gibson Island on June 3 and an Old-squaw there on May 8 (Mrs. Henderson), a flock of about 30 White-winged Scoters seen from the Matapeake Ferry on May 21 (Seth Low), and Surf and American Scoters at Ocean City on May 20 (M.O.S. trip). An unusual record for Washington County was a single White-winged Scoter at Edgemont Reservoir, May 4-6 (Green and Stauffers). Interesting summer records included an American Golden-eye at Chase on June 25 (Douglas Hackman) and an Old-squaw at Sandy Point on July 16 (Edward LaFleur and Ray Beasley). Two Gadwalls and a Green-winged Teal at the Marshall Dierssen Refuge east of Seneca on Aug. 19 (John W. Taylor) were extremely early, as was a White-winged Scoter at Poplar Island, Talbot Co., on Aug. 26 (Hendersons).

Hawks. A Marsh Hawk seen near Buckeystown in Frederick County on June 11 by Stewart, may have been a nesting bird, although no nests have yet been found in the area between Garrett County and the Eastern Shore. Other birds of this species remained to May 31 at Patuxent Refuge (more than a month beyond the latest previous date), and to May 21 at Clear Spring. A Duck Hawk at Assateague Island on May 20 (Low and others) is also a record date.

Shorebirds. The Purple Sandpiper was another species to establish a late spring record; 12 were still present on the Ocean City jetties on May 20 and 21 (M.O.S. trip). The marbled Godwit and Red Phalarope had not previously been identified in Maryland during the spring migration; on May 6 Mrs. Tappan closely observed a Marbled Godwit at Gibson Island, and on May 20, 2 Red Phalaropes were watched in the Ocean City Inlet by many participants on the M.O.S. trip. On the latter date a Northern Phalarope was seen in the West Ocean City pond by the same observers. One Semipalmated Plover, a Dowitcher, and 9 Semipalmated Sandpipers were noted at Ocean City on June 26 by Stewart and Gorman Bond. Subsequent observations may show that these and other shorebirds summer more frequently than is generally realized. One of the most interesting records during the early fall flight was a Hudsonian Godwit at Assateague Island on Aug. 13 (Stewart and E. O. Mellinger); other counts made over the entire length of the Maryland part of Assateague Island on the same day were: 19 Ruddy Turnstones, 1700 Semipalmated Sandpipers, 200 Western Sandpipers, and 1810 Sanderlings. On a similar count made 17 days later, the counts of these four species were 73, 420, 100, and 2385, respectively. Additional interesting birds on the latter date (Aug. 30) included 46 Knots, 14 White-rumped Sandpipers, and a Northern Phalarope (Stewart).

Gulls and Terns. The only 1949-50 record of the Iceland Gull was obtained on the near record date of May 8 when one was identified from the Sandy Point ferry by the Hendersons. The Black-backed Gull continued its recent trend toward late spring departures and early fall arrivals, but did not establish any new records this year. It was found at Ocean City to May 20 (M.O.S. trip) and at Assateague on Aug. 23 (3 adults, Mellinger). As many as 16 were counted on Assateague Island, Aug. 30 (Stewart). Ring-billed Gulls departed from the upper Chesapeake between June 2 (50) and June 10 (2 at Middle River, Willis). Single birds were noted at Middle River on June 24 and July 3; then on July 5 Willis observed 25. The count increased regularly until it reached 302 birds on Aug. 27. A fine flight of Ring-bills was also noted along the coast. Stewart counted 590 on Assateague Island on Aug. 13 and 840 on Aug. 30. Forster's Terns, an adult and 2 young, reached Oxford by July 13 (Hendersons), and Middle River by the 31st (Willis). The first 3 Common Terns arrived at Middle River on July 2. A Roseate Tern, one of the few records for Maryland, was seen by Buckalew and Low on May 20 at West Ocean City. Least Terns were absent from Middle River between May 27 and Aug. 2; they reached a peak of 10, Aug. 4-14, and the last one was recorded there on Aug. 31 (Willis). The first Royal Tern was seen at Ocean City on Aug. 5 (Robert Dickerman, Robert Gibbs, Martha Trever); 4 were present on the 13th, and 34 on Aug. 30 (Stewart). Caspian Terns reached a very high spring count of 31 at Middle River on May 13, then decreased to 3 on June 3 (Willis). Single birds were noted there on July 10 and 12 (the first July records for Maryland) and on Aug. 16 and 18; then 3 on Aug. 25. None were seen at Assateague on Aug. 13, but 4 were present on the 30th. An inland record of the Black Tern was made at Druid Lake in Baltimore on May 13 (Pearl Heaps); the Hendersons saw 12 early fall migrants on July 13 at Oxford in Talbot County.

Flycatchers, Fish Crow. A peak count of 50 Kingbirds was reported at Gibson Island on May 12 by Mrs. Henderson. Alder Flycatchers, always a rarity east of the mountains, were identified at Hyattsville on May 14 and 20 (Wm. Howard Ball) and at Patuxent Refuge on May 22 (Clark Webster) and May 29 (Stewart). Two olive-sided Flycatchers were watched at Indian Springs on May 19 by Allen Duvall and Robbins; the only eastern report was a single bird at Lake Roland on May 25 (Alice Kaestner). A Fish Crow was seen regularly near Clear Spring, May 18-22 (Duvall and Robbins), and several were noted at Buckeystown on June 11 (Stewart); the breeding range of this species away from tidewater is very poorly known.

Nuthatches, Wrens. Late Red-breasted Nuthatches were noted at Middle River on May 11 (1, Willis), and at Patuxent on May 6 (4, Springer and Robbins) and May 12 (1, Stewart). A very late Winter Wren was identified at Lake Roland on May 9 (A.A. Brandenburg), and another seen at Patuxent on May 10 (Robbins) is the latest spring migration record for Maryland. A Short-billed Marsh Wren observed at Clear Spring on May 18 (Robbins) is apparently the first record for Washington County. Two Short-bills which were heard singing in suitable habitat at Patuxent Refuge from Aug. 8 on may have been nesting birds (Stewart), although there still is no definite nesting record for that area.

Thrushes, Kinglets, Pipits. Once more the Veery was recorded well into June in several parts of Baltimore. Although no actual nest has yet been reported there, singing birds in Gwynns Falls Park on June 21 and at several places in Leakin Park the next day (Miss Brandenburg) strongly suggest nesting. Very late Ruby-crowned Kinglets were seen at Woodside on May 7 (John H. Fales), at Middle River on May 11 (Willis), and at Clear Spring on May 19 (Robbins); the latter is the latest spring record for the State. Pipits were equally late, hundreds being seen at Buckeystown on May 2 (Stewart and Brooke Meanley) and 2 (3 days short of the latest State record) at Clear Spring on May 18 (Robbins and Duvall).

Vireos, Warblers. A Philadelphia Vireo was carefully studied at Gwynns Falls in Baltimore on May 16 (Miss Brandenburg) and another at Towson on the early date of Aug. 31 (Mr. and Mrs. Richard Cole). Some of the more interesting warbler records have been selected for brief tabulation, all extremely high counts or early or late State records being underscored. Early spring arrivals: Tennessee Warbler, May 6, Buckeystown (Stewart and Meanley), Patuxent Refuge (Robbins), and Gibson Island--first record for the island (Mrs. Henderson); Mourning Warbler, May 8, 1 at Beltsville (Fales). High counts (locality is Patuxent Refuge unless otherwise indicated): Black and White Warbler, 46 on May 6 (Robbins and Springer); Blue-winged Warbler, 17 on May 10 (Stewart and Robbins); Tennessee Warbler, 66 in 4 hours on May 14 (Robbins); Parula Warbler, 112 on May 6; Magnolia Warbler, 69 on May 10; Cape May Warbler, 21 at Patuxent on May 13 (Stewart) and 19 at Seneca on May 6 (Frank Cross); Black-throated Blue Warbler, 119 on May 10; Black-throated Green Warbler, 37 on May 10; Blackburnian Warbler, 89 on May 10; Chestnut-sided Warbler, 161 on May 10; Bay-breasted Warbler, 24 on May 13; Oven-bird,

63 at Patuxent, May 6, and 66 at Baltimore the same date (Duvall Jones); Northern Water-thrush, 18 on May 13; Kentucky Warbler, 39 on May 10; Yellow-throat, 105 on May 6; Yellow-breasted Chat, 24 at Patuxent, May 6, and 26 at Baltimore the same day (Jones); Hooded Warbler, 50 on May 6; Canada Warbler, 72 on May 10; and Redstart, 91 at Patuxent on May 6 and 130 at Baltimore the same day (Jones). Late spring departures: Golden-winged Warbler, 1 at Beltsville, May 18 (Ball); Blue-winged Warbler, 1 at Beltsville, May 18 (Ball), and 1 at Willards, May 20, Rev. Jay H. Arnold; Tennessee Warbler, 1 at Towson, May 25 (Cole); Magnolia Warbler, May 28 (Woodstock trip); Cape May Warbler, 1 at Beltsville, May 22 (Ball); Black-throated Blue Warbler, May 28 (Woodstock trip); Myrtle Warbler, May 20, Pocomoke River at Willards (M.O.S. trip), 1 at Patuxent, May 24 (Oscar Warbach), and 1 at Woodstock, May 28 (Miss Brandenburg and others); Bay-breasted Warbler, 1 at Gibson Island, June 7 (Mary McLean); Black-poll Warbler, 2 at Middle River, June 5 (Willis); Yellow Palm Warbler, 1 at Beltsville, May 12 (Ball); and Northern Water-thrush, 1 at Patuxent, May 30 (Stewart). Rarities: Single Brewster's Warblers at Middle River on May 3 (Willis) and Patuxent on May 10 (Robbins); 1 Western Palm Warbler at Patuxent, May 10 (Robbins, Robert Mitchell, Clyde Vance). Early fall arrivals: Black and White Warbler, 1 at Middle River, Aug. 7 (Willis); Golden-winged Warbler, 1 at Middle River, Aug. 13 (Willis); Blue-winged Warbler, 1 at Middle River, Aug. 8 (Willis); Tennessee Warbler, 1 at Towson, Aug. 31 (Cole); Magnolia Warbler, 1 at Towson, Aug. 24 (Cole) and 1 at Middle River, Aug. 26; Myrtle Warbler, 1 at Towson, Aug. 31 (Cole); Blackburnian Warbler, Towson, Aug. 21 (Cole) and Gibson Is., Aug. 23 (Dr. Vinup); Chestnut-sided Warbler, Aug. 15 at Towson (Cole) and Middle River (Willis), and Aug. 19 at Pennyfield Locks (Taylor); Northern Water-thrush, Aug. 5 at Middle River (Willis); Wilson's Warbler, Aug. 26 at Middle River (Willis); and Canada Warbler, Aug. 13 (2 on Aug. 15)(Willis).

Tanagers. The Scarlet Tanager was extraordinarily abundant. The most significant counts were made at Patuxent Refuge by Stewart and others as follows: 68 on May 6, 94 on May 10, 110 on May 13. During the spring migration period, Summer Tanagers were recorded north to Lake Roland (May 4, Mrs. Kaestner) and Middle River (May 2, Willis); the northernmost summer record was a pair at Parole, Anne Arundel Co., on June 25 (Neil Hotchkiss).

Finches and Sparrows. The first Dickcissel was observed at the Buckeystown nesting area on May 2 by Stewart and Meanley. Four days later one male was seen at Patuxent (Robbins) furnishing the first known occurrence of this species on the Maryland coastal plain. Purple Finches and Pine Siskins remained with us later than usual. The former species was reported from Seneca and Patuxent on May 13, and from Indian Springs on the 19th; the Siskin was last seen at Patuxent on May 10 (14 birds counted by Stewart), at Hyattsville on the 12th (1, Ball), and at Baltimore on the 22nd (2, Jones). An early fall Rose-breasted Grosbeak was found at Middle River on Aug. 30 (Willis). A pair of Savannah Sparrows was recorded 3 miles south of Buckeystown on June 13 (Stewart), and the first summer record for Washington County was obtained by Duvall and Robbins, who recorded 3 pairs singing on territories northeast of Clear Spring in late May and

located one of them again on June 30. An observation of 3 Savannah Sparrows in North Woodside on Aug. 14, a full month ahead of the earliest fall migration record (Cross) suggests that these birds may have nested not far away. So we close with the same thought which terminated last year's May to August summary: that there is still much to learn about the breeding distribution of the Savannah Sparrow within our State.

Chandler S. Robbins

#### CHRONOLOGY OF A BARN SWALLOW NEST AT GIBSON ISLAND

About the middle of May, several years ago, a pair of Barn Swallows started several nests, in several locations, on consecutive days, in my garage. On the 22nd of May, they picked a location in the center of the garage and started to build in earnest a nest attached to one of the rafters and resting on an electric light cable. As this was right over my car and made a mess on it, I broke the nest down each day, only to have the birds start all over again early in the morning. On the 26th day of May, after I knocked down a partially built nest, one of the swallows flew in with a beak full of mud, and seeing what I had done, sat on the wire and called me names unmentionable by the looks he gave me. I, therefore, decided to park my car outside the garage and let the swallows take over.

On May 31st, they had finished the nest and on the night of June 1st, I saw the female sitting on the nest and the male perched on the electric wire beside the nest. On the morning of June 2nd, both birds were gone all day and I examined the nest and found one egg in it. The swallows were back that evening, female on the nest, male on the wire. June 3rd--two eggs. This process was repeated each night, June 4th, 5th and 6th. On the latter date, there were five eggs in the nest, and both birds started setting on the eggs--one relieving the other at intervals. On the morning of June 20th, four eggs were hatched (incubation period 14 days), and the fifth egg apparently was unhatched; and on June 21st there was no sign of the fifth egg in the nest. There were little "birdlets" in the nest with the first fuzz of feathers. I was unable to count whether there were four or five until June 23rd when it was apparent there were five.

From June 23rd to July 8th, both birds were kept very busy feeding their young and it was very interesting to note how both the young birds and older birds cooperated keeping the nest from being fouled. On July 8th, the five young birds, which were so large they could hardly all stay in the nest, all left the nest and started flying. For a day or so, the young birds mostly perched on an electric wire outside the garage as the older birds brought insects to them, frequently making them fly to take the food on the wing.

This nesting experience, which took place several years ago, greatly stimulated my interest in bird watching. I have often regretted that I did not band the young birds to see if they are the ones that return to their birthplace or whether it is only the older ones.

C. F. Abbott & K. B. Abbott



## CATOCTIN CONFERENCE, 1950

The 1950 Annual Statewide Meeting of the Society is a pleasant memory in the minds of 125 members who gathered from various parts of the state for our third visit to Camp Greentop, in the Catoctin Mountains.

Many people had urged that the pattern of previous years be maintained, and much of the program was along the lines of 1948 and 1949. One innovation was the addition of a session of "papers" on Maryland birdlife, designed to inspire members to independent study and participation in future years. Other changes were few, yet on all sides we heard the equivalent of "best one yet" when the three-day meeting was over. For those who could not be with us, here are just a few highlights of the 1950 conference.

**FRIDAY NIGHT:** Members piling in from all directions until midnight ... Miss Burner slaving over the reservations desk ... colored name tags identify the 6 local clubs ... Miss Sandy signing up volunteers for camp duties ... toting blankets to the cabins in the trees ... fellowship of the campfire ... start of three days of the camp game "Twenty Bird Questions" ... hilarity when one of the experts misses an obvious one ... kitchen crew working late.

**SATURDAY:** The 5:40 bell; horrors! ... coffee & doughnuts fortify the early observers ... warblers everywhere, and 50 people out before breakfast ... first of many fine meals from the volunteer committee and the paid colored chef ... choice of botany, bird song or photography walks ... rounds of the banding traps ... down to the council ring for the first "papers" session, with grand contributions by Chan Robbins, Ogden Ramsay, Ken Hodgdon and Seth Low ... leased during Mr. Ramsay's papers ... strenuous hike to Chimney Rock ... State Board meeting in the Quonset Hut ... time for twilight bird walks ... the annual meeting, with fine color movies by Tyrrell and Edwards ... square dancing until late, to strains of a mountain orchestra and Bill Geatty's fine calling ... astronomy class at midnight.

**SUNDAY:** More of the same: coffee, early birds, breakfast food and fun, nature walks ... back to the Foxville Valley for wonderful birding, with Cape May Warblers everywhere ... hike to beautiful Cunningham Falls by the Cliff Trail ... final good-byes and "see you next year!"

Orville Crowder