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A QUARTERLY JOURNAL  
DEVOTED TO TENNESSEE BIRDS

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AMERICAN EGRETS AT REELFOOT LAKE

---Photo by C. F. Pickering

# THE MIGRANT

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## THE SEASONS ON REELFOOT LAKE

By CHARLES F. PICKERING

It is the purpose of this article to present to the reader some of the birds and some of the wild-life that can be seen during the seasons of the year on Reelfoot Lake.

Truly much can be seen, and I am aware that I will omit many things that a more experienced writer would see and write about. I will not go into detail of what I have experienced, but will write in general.

Fishing and hunting in this region attracted my attention some thirty years ago and as the years passed I became aware of the wonders and the many things of interest that could be seen on Reelfoot. I started leaving my gun at home years ago and shot my birds with my camera. The ducks I have shot in the last fifteen years are not on cold storage but on film, and I can at will witness their flights, their coloring, and the surroundings in which I found them.

Each year since the Federal Government closed certain areas during the shooting season I have had permits to enter at my leisure, watch the ducks on the water and in flight. It is a wonderful experience to move about quietly and jump hundreds of several species. At times they would be so close to me both on the water and in the air that I had no need of binoculars.

The ducks soon learn—and soon is the word—that in these closed areas they are safe from the shooters. When they are flushed they will circle the area which they are in and soon alight. They seem to know its boundaries, whether it be large or small.

Anchor or drift in the lily pads if you wish, and they are all around. Travel slowly around the edges of the grass, and you can jump great numbers of Mallards, Pintail, Scaup, Teal and Shovelers, with hundreds of Coots always mixed with them.

Some years the beautiful Tree Swallows come with the ducks. I have witnessed hundreds of these Swallows suddenly swoop from the air and perch on some medium-sized cypress tree when the tree suddenly becomes a thing of beauty as they sit with their snow white breasts in contrast to the brown of the tree. It reminds one of a Christmas tree suddenly made beautiful by some magic wand.

There is no doubt but that these Swallows play in their flight. I have seen a bird take a feather high into the air, release it and hundreds encircle it as it falls slowly towards the water. Within a foot or two of the water another bird would take it and fly high again and release it, and the same

performance would continue. Finally it would be allowed to strike the water and the game would be over.

One of the winter high-lights is to witness each afternoon between four and four-thirty—this time of day will be about the same from year to year—the Redwings coming in to roost for the night. The wild rice marshes at the head of the lake probably are their feeding grounds, and they come down the lake to roost in the grass for the night.

Years ago when I first witnessed this sight, I often wondered if I wasn't seeing millions of them. What I have read later confirmed my personal estimates. It has been estimated by Dunbar (1951) and Ganier (1937) that one would see in an hour's time more or less 2,000,000 Redwings, 1,000,000 Grackles, 1,000,000 Starlings, 200,000 Cowbirds and 5,000 Robins.

Their flight down the lake is precision of movement. They dive, swing to the right or left, and their patterns are perfect, no large open spaces, no ragged edge, and no stragglers. The column is always compact and at times so dense one cannot see the sky. This flight occurs again at dawn on their return to the feeding grounds, but it has not the precision of movement that it had in the afternoon.

Later on in the winter if the weather is extremely cold, most of the ducks move onto water that is not frozen, to the Mississippi River or farther South.

This is the time for the Bald Eagle to appear and the Eagles that nest on Reelfoot are joined by others coming from more northern lakes and rivers which perhaps are frozen over. These Eagles watch the few open places that are not frozen and pick up injured and dead ducks. When the lake begins to freeze, one can occasionally see from six to ten Eagles in one tree, a magnificent sight.

In recent years channels have been cut from the big open water into the arms of the lake, and at the ends of these arms goose ponds have been established. Last November I estimated a thousand Canada Geese rose in flight when I approached one pond. My pictures would have been better, I believe, if there hadn't been so many. As I did not get as close as I wished, my pictures looked more like black-birds than geese. From time to time during the day we could see flights coming in to the ponds, and these flights were always spotted with Snow and Blue Geese, the Canada however predominating.

These goose ponds are carefully watched and protected, and no shooting is allowed. A high electric fence surrounds the place and during the duck season a guard is always on watch. As a result of these precautions the goose population is increasing from year to year.

Spring of the year comes, and with it a Prothonotary Warbler for every square of grass. There are as many Song Sparrows some years as Warblers. The Prothonotary Warblers stay on, but the Song Sparrows soon leave. Before they go however, the lake is serenaded, and until one learns their song, you can imagine many water whistles being piped by as many small boys.

The Least Terns are there by the hundreds and remind one of large



beautiful white butterflies as they fly and flutter over the water. They hover seemingly motionless over a spot, drop suddenly to the water and rarely miss the small fish they have seen.

Paddle around close to the saw grass, moving slowly, and you will see the Sora and Virginia Rails and the Florida and Purple Gallinules running in and out of the matted vegetation at the edge of the grass. Look closely in the thick grass, and you will find the nest of the Least Bittern.

Leave your boat and walk into the thick cane that borders some parts of the lake, and you will hear the song of the Swainson's Warbler. Hunt a little harder and probably you will find the nest.

Back in the boat again, and enter Mud Basin, and at its edge you will see the Bald Eagles' nest some eighty-five feet above the water. This nest to my knowledge is about fifteen years old. High winds blew it out in the summer of 1943, but it was rebuilt in the same tree in the fall of 1944.

Dr. Walter Spofford and I found it contained three young eaglets in May 1945. The tree was spiked one day and the next day was climbed and the young birds banded. Motion pictures were made from the water and still Kodachromes were made standing on a limb by the nest.

In May or early June we visited "Cranetown", the heronry, at the north end of Big Ronaldson Slough. "It covers an area about one quarter mile in length and about four to five hundred feet in width". (Ganier) If the lake is low you can wade in as I have done, but most of the time you will need a boat for your visit.

In this heronry your total count of nests will be about as follows: American Egret, 600; Double-Crested Cormorant, 250; Great Blue Heron, 150; Black-Crowned Night Heron, 50; Anhinga, 40. I believe I have seen this number of nests, but the figures above are from an article written by Wendell L. Whittemore (1939). These nests are loosely woven platforms from twenty to twenty-four inches across, and of different depths, and often twenty or more in one tree.

In May 1945 Dr. Walter Spofford and I missed our trail back from this heronry and went a little deeper into this wild region. We jumped several herds of deer, and found the nests of the Great Horned Owl and the Duck Hawk. The trees were climbed and photographs made of the young birds.

The lake offers a pretty sight around the first of September. The American Egret, I believe, is the predominating bird about this time. Move around in the big water such as Blue Basin, count the snags and stumps protruding from its surface, and you will have the same number of Egrets, for one will be on almost every stump. You will see a number of Great Blues, but the Egret predominates. You find the greatest number on the large water, where there are many short stumps, and in late afternoon their number increases. Watch them closely and you will see them go to roost for the night in some substantial tree emerging from the water. Fifty or more will be in one tree and this number or more in another close by.

After dark and when they are all at roost, I believe it impossible to get close enough to them for flash photography. I believe it, because I have

failed in my efforts a number of times. Even with an expert at the oars they will leave before you can get within fifty yards of them.

I recommend to anyone who is interested in birds and wildlife a visit to Reelfoot. You will see many things of interest and your visit will be long remembered.

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CLARKSVILLE, TENNESSEE

### A VOICE IN THE NIGHT

By DIXON MERRITT

Through all the dusks and dawns of the summer of 1950, I was tantalized by a bird voice which I could not identify. And I was equally unable ever to see the bird from which it came. The call resembled that of the Nighthawk but was more querulous and much more frequently repeated. It resembled, too, the night call of the Woodcock but rang somewhat clearer. I never doubted that it was a relatively small bird and near at hand.

Not until next spring, that of 1951, did I discover that I had been looking for the wrong kind of bird in the wrong place. That discovery came one twilight when, walking across my barn pound, I heard the call coming, apparently, from a row of cedars along the west fence. At the cedars, the sound seemed as far away as ever. I followed it—like the rainbow's end—across an open pasture, up a wooded hillside, to a field on the hilltop. There half way along the field fence, on a branch of a scrawny black gum, was the bird—a Barn Owl. He was fully an eighth of a mile farther away than he sounded when I started following his call.

Crouching under the bushes along the fence, I was able to approach to within a few yards of the black gum. I listened for a quarter of an hour to the Barn Owl's calls. There was in them the eerie "kschh" which Peterson describes as a snore. In them, too, were the querulous "quack-quack" and the "ack-ack" which Bendire describes. But, preceding every call of whatever character, there was a rasping squeal, almost indistinguishable from that of a Red-tailed Hawk. This I have not seen described, or even mentioned, anywhere.

Knowing now what I was looking and listening for, the rest was easy. The Barn Owls (there were a pair of them) every twilight through the summer ranged from the hillside west of my house, mainly from the tall top of a dead persimmon, over a sedge grown area which I had long known to be heavily infested with meadow mice. By circling through the bushes, I was frequently able to approach them closely. They called incessantly. And the call was always preceded by the muted squeal that was inaudible from a distance greater than a few hundred feet.

Thus ended the fall of 1951. If the owls ever approached my barn, I was unable to see them. Through that winter, however, their presence in the barn was apparent. I found many of their regurgitated pellets in the hay loft. Pellet, however is not the word. They were fur cylinders, some of them two inches long. I was never able to find a feather in any of them.

The Barn Owls did not nest in the barn and I was never able to find where they did—until the spring of 1952. Then one night my dog barked incessantly and got me out of bed longer before daylight than my usual rising time. A great fire was burning among the big trees in the south lot. At daylight the dog and I went to investigate.

Night hunters, with an oil-soaked rag tied to the end of a pole, had set fire to an old white oak with a great cavity at the base of the wide-spreading branches. All the branches were fallen and the trunk was charred and scarred. This had been the Barn Owl's home. I heard them a few times afterward but they shortly moved away. Much that I meant to learn about them I shall never know now.

Two things, however, I did learn: the elusive ventriloquial quality of the call, always seeming much nearer than it is; and the never failing presence of the preceding muted squeal. And one thing perhaps equally important, I did not find. The "sudden wild, startling scream" which Chapman says is the only note he ever heard from a Barn Owl was never once sounded by these Barn Owls in the two years that I listened to them.

LEBANON, TENNESSEE

## BIRD STUDY THROUGH THE WINTER MONTHS

By ALBERT F. GANIER, President of T. O. S.

When this issue reaches our members, the fall migration with all of its interesting highlights will be about over, and field workers will be casting about for subjects for special study during the winter months. The annual Christmas bird census must be prepared for and taken, of course, and can be sandwiched in with a project of greater continuity. While many will want to keep up with their weekly field lists, with eyes ever alert for choice "finds" along the way, still others will want to apply their observations to a special subject for study and upon which they can focus greater attention while afield. Such a project may be carried on year after year and will become more and more interesting as one finds answer to many of the mysteries of avian economy and survival. I have grouped below ten subjects that might well be considered.

1—Periodic census lists of a single area. (Once-a-week listings and tabulation will show the changes in population thru the season. This may be correlated with respect to food supply, weather changes, etc.)

2—Habitat preference. (How constant in their preference are certain birds to such habitats as woods, thickets, old fields, grasslands, stream banks, marshes, etc.?)

3—Group composition. (Many birds, for protection or because of inclination to sociability, prefer to be in mixed groups. Which birds show preferences for this association?).



4—Foods and feeding habits. (By closely watching thru the season what foods birds are eating and how they procure it, one may learn much of interest on this subject).

5—Roosting habits. (Where do birds roost in order to survive the rigors of inclement winter nights? By watching birds at dusk, and by night searching by flashlight, much can be ascertained. See articles in THE MIGRANT for March 1943 and March 1944).

6—Mortality and causes. (What are the factors that prevent birds from rapidly increasing, considering the occasional instances of some small birds having lived for ten or more years? We should learn what part is played by predators, inclement weather, food supply, disease, etc.)

7—Diurnal periods of activity. (Aside from the well-known period of early morning activity, what is the daily cycle of activity thereafter? Do birds have one or more "siestas" or rest periods? How are these affected by weather, food abundance, and season? This study would not extend into the nesting season.)

8—Behavior during rain, sleet, snow and wind. (How is this further affected by time of day, temperature, season, and approaching cold weather?)

9—Mannerism. (Before binoculars came into general use, ornithologists relied heavily upon their knowledge of bird mannerism for identification. Through the years, the writer has found this to be an extremely interesting study. When the light is poor and birds are silent, one can learn to identify them by noting their actions. For example, do they walk, hop or run; do they scratch or not; are they active or sluggish; do they feed upon the ground, in brush, weeds, tree trunks, or branches; do they sit erect or crouch; how do they carry their wings and tail; what is their manner of flight; what are their profiles and relative sizes; etc?)

10—Life history studies of a particular species, or even two or more closely related species. (Some of our members have already chosen to make such a study, preferably of one that is not rare so that it may be found regularly on field trips. Those that are permanent residents are to be preferred and the following are suggested: the two vultures, Sparrow Hawk, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Kingfisher, Flicker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, woodpeckers as a group, Blue Jay, Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Bewick's Wren, Carolina Wren, Mockingbird, Robin, Bluebird, Starling, Cardinal, Towhee and Field Sparrow. Observers capable of doing more arduous or intensive field work may wish to choose a rarer species.)

Many other lines of study may suggest themselves after reading the above outline and field work can be profitably supplemented by research of the ornithological literature. Full written field notes should be kept and these reduced to graphic charts where practicable. The results of well carried out studies as above suggested would form the basis of valuable papers to be read at meetings or to be offered for publication in our journal.—2112 WOODLAWN DR., NASHVILLE 12, TENN., Sept. 1952.

## THE ROUND TABLE

SOUTHWESTERN TENNESSEE HERONRIES.—I can look out of our fourteenth floor office window and see the site of a new heronry on Middle or Redmond Bar, four miles away and less than two miles from the Memphis city limits. Thru the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Merrill Schwartz, who had discovered the rookery's establishment in 1950, I was able to visit the heronry on May 17, 1952. I estimated about 750 nests in an area about 100 by 150 yards, of which 150 were probably those of the Snowy Egret and the remainder those of the Little Blue Heron. Two of the latter were chiefly white with a light slate blue on the back of the head and inner primaries. Two American Egrets were seen there. The nests were up five to twenty-five feet in small willows that were up to thirty-five feet tall. There were young in less than five nests; one-fourth of the nests were empty (some incomplete), and the remainder had one to three eggs judging from those I could see well. Less than 300 yards across water is a sandy spit of the towhead at which many pleasure boats tie up. Across the river and along the Harahan viaduct in Arkansas are a number of "pits" that used to be frequented by the late summer herons. As willows grew in these, the number of herons there diminished. This spring we have seen Snowy Egrets there: 51 in a group on May 22, 27 in four groups on May 24. Two American Egrets were seen each time. The above described heronry being four miles away, these birds may be from it. As yet I have not noticed any feeding location for the Little Blue Herons.

The presence of the Snowy Egret is interesting because it probably used to nest in this area as well as to the north before its near extermination about 1900. Our first record for this area since that time is of three at North Lake, Shelby County, on Aug. 13, 1936, seen by Pond and Clayton (Coffey, 1936. *Migrant*, 7:68). We might say that it has taken over fifty years for the species to recover and return here to nest.

While there may be scattered nests, I have never during the nesting season seen more than a few herons in the Enslly-Darwin bottoms and at Mud and Horn Lakes. North Lake, between these and relatively inaccessible, could harbor a colony but I doubt if there is one as mentioned by Ganier for his probable site No. 6 (1951. *Migrant* 22:2). His site No. 5 is given as Open Lake, but even tho I was unable to get out on this lake on June 24, 1951, I do not believe there is a heronry near it. However, there have been indications of one southeast of Golddust. On June 22, 1947, our party noticed several American Egrets crossing the Mississippi and flying into the bottoms there. Since a heronry might be at either end of the line of travel, in 1948 we went up thru Arkansas along the river, but saw no indications of a heronry. Taking the ferry across to Ashport, Tenn., we drove south to Golddust; only three American Egrets were then recorded. On June 24, 1951, we drove into the area and then I walked about a mile north along Cotton or Jones Bayou and then a mile west thru a cypress brake; a total of eight egrets were seen but there was no sign of a heronry.—BEN B. COFFEY, JR., Memphis, Tenn.

WHITE IBIS AT MUD LAKE, TENN.-MISS.—On Aug. 23, 1952, Brother Leo Thomas and I on our approach to Mud Lake noticed a White Ibis in flight over the far corner of the lake. It circled nearer, settled into the arrowhead, and later was seen in flight a second time. It was in immature plumage, being brown with white belly and rump. This is apparently the third record for Tennessee. On Sept. 2, 1935, Franklin McCamey (Migrant 1935: 52-68) saw an adult White Ibis at North Horn Lake, Tenn., a mile east northeast of Mud Lake. On July 29, 1949, four immatures were seen in Knox County by Isabel H. Tipton and Joseph C. Howell (Migrant, 1949: 50-51). In Mississippi Merritt G. Vaiden has several records for Rosedale, noting his only immature (Migrant, 1952: 2) on July 19, 1951. In Audubon Field Notes, 1951: 22, P. J. Van Huizen reports an immature, July 27, 1950, and L. McAdams four, Sept. 10, 1950, at the White River Refuge, St. Charles, Ark.—BEN B. COFFEY, JR., MEMPHIS TENNESSEE

KING RAIL NEST IN SHELBY COUNTY, TENN.—Our first definite breeding record of the King Rail for Shelby County was the finding of a nest with six eggs (incomplete) on May 25, 1952, by Ben Coffey and the writer. It was located in a very small roadside marsh on Covington Pike, .8 mile south of the Pleasant Ridge Road, where I found the species in the summers of 1950 and 1951. Our previous nest records were for Lakeview, Miss., in the Highway 61 barrow pit which was unfortunately drained about 15 years ago. The species is occasionally encountered, but suitable nesting habitat is uncommon in this vicinity.—R. DEMETT SMITH, JR., MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

PURPLE GALLINULES NEAR McMINNVILLE.—On July 30, 1952, I found a pair of Purple Gallinules (*Iononris martinica*) and an empty nest in the extensive marsh bordering a 12 acre lake, 11 miles northeast of McMinnville, Tenn., on Highway 70S. This spring fed lake, built about 30 years ago, has now been almost completely covered with water lilies, and deep borders of cattails and marsh grasses make it well suited to marsh birds. The Gallinules on hearing me wading through the cattails, left this cover and walked across the lily pads to the waters edge 100 feet away, feeding nervously there in full view. The nest, empty but in good condition, was found at their point of exit, built among the cattails and 30 inches above the knee-deep water. When I had completed the half circuit of the lake, I found that the pair had returned to cover.

I recorded one of these Gallinules on May 17, 1936, at a four-acre marsh near Morrison 20 miles southeast, and at Goose Pond near Pelham (35 miles south), I found a pair with nest and 6 eggs on May 26, 1935 (Migrant, 1935, 6: 23).

On the first mentioned pond I also heard a pair of King Rails at one point and farther on I flushed a single individual. Numerous empty Red-winged Blackbird nests were found but old birds and young had left with the exception of one adult female which was tending several young only a few days out of the nest. This was a very late nesting date for this

species since incubation began not earlier than the first week in July. Due to the extremely hot sun prevailing on the day of my visit, the marshy border was only about half traversed, else more marsh birds, including Least Bitterns, would probably have been flushed.—ALBERT F. GANIER, 2112 WOODLAWN DR., NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

**BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER NEAR MEMPHIS.**—On Sept. 16, 1952, at Mud Lake, Miss.-Tenn., I observed a Buff-breasted Sandpiper at 20 feet for some time, using coated 7x50 binoculars. The slim Upland Sandpiper resemblance was in contrast to the "peeps" feeding nearby. Demett Smith, Jr., and Mr. Coffey, on their return from a mud-slogging circuit of the lake, were able to study it under similar favorable conditions as the bird was as tame as any Least or other "peep". It was not seen on a return trip the next day. This is our first record for the immediate Memphis area and apparently the second for Tennessee and the third for Mississippi. Capt. Burt L. Monroe (*Migrant* 1944: 76) found two at the Halls Air Base, Tenn., on Sept. 19, 1943. Thomas D. Burleigh in "The Bird Life of the Gulf Coast Region of Mississippi" 1944 gives only one record, a female collected Sept. 6, 1940, on Deer Island. Not far away from this spot a group of Memphians (Floy Barefield, Alice Smith, Demett Smith, Jr., and the Coffeys) added the species to their life-list on Sept. 5, 1949, leisurely studying one on a small baseball field near the Gulfport Yacht Club. Wm. H. Deaderick (*Wilson Bulletin*, 1939: 265) reports it a fairly common fall transient at Hot Springs, Ark., Aug. 8 to Sept. 13 (1935, 1936) —LULA COFFEY, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE.

**A BOX SEAT WITH A PAIR OF MOURNING DOVES.**—On June 30, 1952, when I returned from my vacation, I found that a pair of Mourning Doves were nesting in a purple plum tree just outside my kitchen windows. The nest was about five feet from the window and ten feet from the ground. The nest of a Mourning Dove, as you know, is an astoundingly poor makeshift. This one was composed of a few twigs thrown together so loosely that I wondered if it would last until the young doves were hatched.

From the beginning, the nest was never without an occupant. When the male dove would fly in, the pair would spend much time billing and cooing. Then the female would leave the nest and the other would take over until her return.

On July 6 I noticed that neither parent was on the nest, but in it were two tiny young doves.

Some time later I realized that one parent had gone and left the other to feed the little ones, which it did several times each day. It would leave the nest and find suitable food, and on its return I observed it feeding the young by regurgitation. It followed this routine until the 15th of July when at six in the morning I noticed that the doves were gone. They had left in the night or early morning.

On August 4 the doves again returned and started billing and cooing, and it was my good fortune to view the entire process of nesting.

The original nest, to my great surprise, was not reconditioned. It seemed certain that the eggs would roll out or fall thru the few remaining twigs that were left, but they did not.

Again the nest was never left without an occupant, but as before, one parent departed and left the feeding to the other, which continued the task until suddenly it left with the children before six in the morning.—MARJORIE CLEMENS (MRS. WILLIS CLEMENS), GREENEVILLE, TENN.

DICKCISSEL NEAR ELIZABETHTON—A male Dickcissel, intermittently singing and preening while perched on a power line, was observed by my daughter Linda and me at the Depew Dairy Farm two miles east of Elizabethton at 6:30 o'clock in the evening of July 10, 1952. It was also seen on the following day. No mate was in evidence during the time we watched the bird. The territory has been checked fairly regularly the last few years for birds of various kinds in spring and summer, as well as during the other seasons, without indication, however, of the presence of the Dickcissel. In East Tennessee it has been recorded at Knoxville and Greeneville in recent years. Last year it was reported extending its range eastward. (The Changing Seasons—Audubon Field Notes—October 1951). —FRED W. BEHREND, ELIZABETHTON, TENNESSEE

HENSLOW'S SPARROW IN ELIZABETHTON AREA.—In a small plowed sedge field near Milligan College, approximately 6 miles southwest of Elizabethton, I flushed a sparrow on the rainy afternoon of October 28, 1951. It lit on a branch of a nearby small oak tree and perched motionless and silent, a gusty wind ruffling its feathers. Examination through binoculars showed the bird to have a flat head and short tail, suggestive of its being a Grasshopper Sparrow. However, the date appearing to be rather late in the season for the presence of this species, and noting streaks on breast and side of the bird of which I had a side view, I was not satisfied with this conclusion. Gradually working closer I was able to observe, in the rather dull light, the following additional details: pronounced dark stripe on the side of the crown, lighter narrow center stripe, short dark line behind the eye, well visible eye ring, olive color of side of the head and nape, paleness of the stout bill, rufous color of the lower part of the wing, yellowish-greenish color of side, some of which characteristics made identification, with the field guide in my hand, unmistakable as that of a Henslow's Sparrow. I looked at the bird for about 10 minutes, from as close as 40 feet. When finally flushed upon my closer approach, it flew low downhill and disappeared in a patch of pine trees bordering the field.

Apparently there has been no previous record of the Henslow's Sparrow in the Elizabethton area, and it seems to be a rare species in other parts of East Tennessee (Ganier MIGRANT Vol. 19, June 1948, page 28). —FRED W. BEHREND, Elizabethton, Tenn.



BACHMAN'S SPARROW AT ELIZABETHTON.—Occasional drives in recent years past an extensive area of hillside pasture, sedge fields and briar patches, interspersed with numerous small cedar trees, a short distance west of the South Side community of Elizabethton, impressed me that this might be a place in which to find Bachman's Sparrows.

I investigated in the afternoon of June 10, 1951. Soon after entering the area, I heard the song of a Bachman's Sparrow and spotted the bird in the top of a small cedar tree not far ahead. My daughter Linda, who accompanied me, was a little too eager to get close to the bird, so it flew. But we heard the song again, and found the bird sitting on a low branch of a deciduous tree. We were closer this time and could see all of the Bachman's distinctive markings. A still better view, from about 35 feet, was had later.

I did not succeed in hearing or seeing Bachman's Sparrows again until the afternoon of July 15 at the same place. Later in the afternoon, about a fourth of a mile from this location, I heard the song of a Bachman's Sparrow and felt, in view of the distance between the two places, that this was a second bird.

I looked for the species again on April 23, 1952.. Arriving in the usual place at 5:30 a.m., I heard the song of a Bachman's Sparrow while I was still in the car. The bird seemed close, and in the dim light of dawn it was spotted in the top of a briar where it sang at intervals. To judge from the June and July 1951 observations, and from this, breeding of Bachman's Sparrows in the territory referred to appears quite possible.—FRED W. BEHREND, Elizabethton, Tennessee.

NOTES ON BIRDS OF THE JACKSON, TENN., AREA.—On May 15 I found a dead Virginia Rail on a highway about ten miles west of Jackson. It checked with the description in Peterson's "Field Guide" on all the points of an adult Virginia Rail except it had gray legs while the adult Virginia Rail pictured by Peterson had flesh-colored legs. On the 17th I found two more of these Rails on the same highway about nine miles west of Jackson. These birds had been hit quite a few times and the head and bill were all that could be recognized.

At least two pairs of Barn Swallows and one pair of Rough-winged Swallows used bridges as nesting sites in the Jackson area this spring. This is the first time I have found either swallow nesting here.

Eight singing Horned Larks were found in the Jackson area in early May. At least five males were present at the Experiment Station one mile west of Jackson, two at the airport five miles west of Jackson, and one in a large field about ten miles west of Jackson. Five nests were found in early May. Two were empty but had been used earlier in the year, two had four eggs each in the nests, and one nest had four very young birds. By the middle of May the two nests with eggs had been plowed under, and there was one well-feathered young bird in the nest that had held four young and a second young bird was nearby. On June 13 I found another Lark's nest with four well-feathered young, all of which left the nest by the 16th.—KILIAN ROEVER, Jackson, Tenn.

THE 1952 BLUEBIRD POPULATION IN WARNER PARKS.—Because the 1951 population of Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) in Warner Parks was unusually low after the severe ice storm of January 29 to February 12, 1951 (temperature down to 13 degrees below zero), the results of the 1952 nesting season are of particular interest (1951, Migrant 22 (3) :42).

It is gratifying to find that the 1952 population of nesting Bluebirds was again normal, not quite as large as that of 1950, but almost identical with 1949. During the first nesting period, 75 percent of the 49 available nesting boxes were occupied, 194 eggs were laid, 142 hatched and 130 young fledged successfully—67 percent of the number of eggs laid. This is a high percentage of success for the Warner Parks project.

The second period of 1952 started well with 36 nesting attempts, 164 eggs. However only 89 hatched, with 47 young maturing (29 percent of the eggs). Natural predators, mainly snakes, took a considerable number. There was some interference by people. The abnormally hot and dry weather started in this period.

The third nesting period was particularly disastrous. Although predators are responsible for some of the losses, many others are directly attributable to the excessive heat and severe drouth that prevailed through June and July. In this last period there were 26 nesting attempts with 100 eggs laid; 52 hatched, from which only 21 young matured (21 percent). In 13 nests, I found unhatched fertile clutches of eggs or dead nestlings.

According to the U. S. weather reports for Nashville, June rainfall was .72 inches with temperatures reaching 90 to 106 degrees on 28 days of the month; July rainfall was 1.30 inches and temperatures for 27 days reached 90 to 107.3 degrees. Nest-boxes in open meadows were exposed to sunshine many hours of the day where temperatures reached 120 degrees. The heat and drouth doubtless affected the food supply for many trees lost foliage or died, grass became yellow and brittle, but grasshoppers remained plentiful.

For the entire season of 1952, the Bluebirds made 100 nesting attempts (same as in 1949), with a total of 458 eggs laid (456 in 1949). Of these 283 hatched, from which 198 young fledged, 43 percent of the number of eggs laid. In 1951, there had been only 57 nesting attempts (264 eggs) with 54 percent of the eggs successful.

From my trapping of breeding females, it appears that the population increase in 1952 over 1951 was due to an influx of birds from areas outside of Warner Parks. In previous nesting seasons (1938 through 1950), 432 nesting females had been trapped in their nest-boxes and banded. The smallest number taken in a season was 21 in 1944 and 1947. The largest number was 57 in 1939. Among these trapped females, each year there are some that had been banded in previous seasons in the Warner Parks boxes, varying from 21 percent in 1945 to 57 percent in 1941. But this year (1952) only 3 (12 percent) of the 26 nesting females that I trapped had been banded previously. This is the lowest percentage of banded nesting birds taken since the project was started in 1936.—AMELIA R. LASKEY, 1521 Graybar Lane, Nashville 12, Tennessee

## AUDUBON'S WARBLER, AND OTHER BIRDS, AT JOHNSON CITY.

—On June 1, 1952, there came to one of my liriodendrons a warbler, very pert and a handsome male, and most accomodating, displaying his handsome plumage in easy range of our binoculars while he fed on aphids. We had ample time to study him as he feasted, and we were convinced that he was an Audubon's Warbler. He displayed additional white plumage over that of a Myrtle Warbler, but the deciding factor was the yellow throat patch. This is the first observation of this western bird for our area, as far as our records go, but it is reported by Chapman ("Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America") to have been recorded from Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania.

On May 4, 1952, between 7:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., we listed sixty species of birds along the Watauga River. At Pickens Bridge we observed an aerial battle between a Crow and a Bald Eagle, the first time we have seen an eagle in this section. Whatever may be said about the traits of the Crow, he surely is a canny fighter. Keeping always above his sturdy victim he made dive after dive at the back of the eagle, at which attack the eagle turned over, giving to the watchers a beautiful display of the white in tail and head feathers.

A few miles below Pickens Bridge we found a female Prothonotary Warbler preparing a nesting site along the bank of the Watauga. This is our second record, for ten years ago we found a male Prothonotary some miles below the airport.—BRUCE P. TYLER and ROBERT B. LYLE, Johnson City, Tennessee.

## THE SEASON

NASHVILLE—I am obliged to report a drastic June-July drought at Nashville with intense heat equaled rarely, if ever, in previous weather reports. With two exceptions June temperatures reached 90 degrees or more each day; 11 successive days were over 100 and the maximum was 107.3. After rain July 4 extreme heat and drought continued into late July. The only controlled observations of the effect of this extreme weather on nesting to come to our attention derives from Mrs. Laskey's Bluebird study in Warner Park. There was normal occupancy and good success in the first nesting periods; results of the second period were not remarkable; during the third period addled eggs and dead nestlings were found in significant numbers (see Round Table note in this issue).

Several spring notes of interest included the reports of two separate T. O. S. groups which found over 90 species in the immediate area of Nashville on May 10. This would seem to describe a significant migrating wave on that date. Forty Blue-winged Teal on Radnor Lake were termed unusual by Mr. Ganier because they are ordinarily paired by that date. It was late for twelve Shovellers. A Loon and a Pied-billed Grebe were also on the Lake. A Winter Wren seen on May 3 by Dan Schreiber and Eddie Gleaves was a very late one; only two records, May 7 and 12, are later (Migrant, 13:4, 1942). Dan had a Golden-winged Warbler on April 23 on Love's Hill. Two House Wrens in song on Apr. 23 were reported by H. C. Monk; he also had reports on Apr. 26, 27, and 29. A Shrike was incubating a set of seven eggs on Warner Park Apr. 16 (ARL); the nest was unsuccessful. Johnny Ogden, Douglas Oxford, and Mrs. Goodpasture watched a Worm-eating Warbler feed a well developed fledgling at Basin Spring May 31. As far as we know this is only the third breeding record for this region. McNish, May 7, 1922, and Ganier, June 1, 1941, each found nests with five eggs. Two other nesting records from Basin Springs are of some interest. Five partially-feathered but still downy Sharp-shinned Hawk nestlings were found June 29 twenty-two feet up in a Scrub Pine. After leaving the nest they remained in the territory as late as August 1. Sharp-shins nested in the area last year, thus establishing a new territory for this hawk whose breeding population is very small. In another group of pines close by, two Green Herons, appearing to be two or three weeks old, left their nest on July 27 (KAG). At least one of them, able to fly fairly well and well-feathered but with remnants of down still on its head, was still in the vicinity of the nest August 10.

Nesting records of our more common species are often of special interest because of their dates. In this category falls a brood of four Mockingbirds which Douglas Oxford watched leave their nest August 26. Miss Menifee Cheek banded three Cardinals that left the nest August 25. Mrs. Laskey had a Cardinal that left Sept. 5. Mrs. Bell reports Doves that hatched August 24, and Mr. Monk reports three Dove nests active as late as Sept. 11, one of these being still active on Sept. 16.

Migrations have been noticeable for some weeks. From July 19 thru

August 19 Mr. Monk recorded an unusual number of occurrences of the Upland Plover in night flights. They were recognized by their calls as they passed overhead. The night of July 23-4 a particular wave was noted. A great variety of calls from birds in night-flight have been recorded since August 2 (KAG).

Dr. Mayfield, Johnnie Ogden, and Douglas Oxford found Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, and Blackburnian Warblers at Radnor Lake on August 23. Ruby-crowned Kinglets were seen by Dan Schreiber August 29. A Bald Eagle over Radnor Lake was an exciting find for Douglas and Johnny. The same day they saw two Red-tailed Hawks, a Broad-winged, and a Marsh Hawk. An adult Little Blue Heron with two immatures were on the Lake August 30 along with six Wood Ducks, as reported by Miss Riggs. On Sept. 15 a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and a Northern Waterthrush were in the Centennial Park area (HCM). On Sept. 15 a flock of about sixty Bobolinks were feeding on Foxtail grass seeds in the Buena Vista Bottoms. (JR. and KAG).—KATHERINE A GOODPASTURE.

KNOXVILLE—Three spring records are worth noting: One Cliff Swallow on April 5 and one Tree Swallow on April 6, seen by Dick Laurence at Baum's Lake are the earliest records for these birds. A Common Loon on April 5, seen by Richard Lorenz near Concord, is the latest that one has been recorded in this area.

As did much of the country, this area had the hottest June on record and a hot July and August with an accompanying drought. None of the observations made in this area have been detailed and careful enough to determine if this unusual weather had any effect on nesting birds. One record indicating a change that began some time ago is of a nesting House Wren in Knoxville, active on May 4. 1951 was the first year that nesting House Wrens were reported in this area. Another record for this year was of a singing Wren on June 26. A Blue Grosbeak nest, second reported for this area, was found on June 20 near Boyd's Station, and a total of five of these birds were found on June 22. A third species becoming established in Knox County is the Dickcissel; on June 22 near Boyd's Station a female was seen to feed a young bird a few days out of the nest, the first indication in recent years of a nest of this species in this area.

Some other unusual nesting records probably are the result of a better knowledge of the birds of this area rather than of changes. Mrs. R. A. Monroe found two adult King Rails with six young on June 22 near Virtue. Also on June 22 a colony of about fifteen pairs of Black-crowned Night Herons was found at Jones Bend on the Blount County side of Fort Loudon Lake by J. C. Howell. On June 20 two pairs of Worm-eating Warblers each with at least two fledglings, and four other adults, were seen at Roaring Springs by J. C. Howell; this is the second nesting record for Knox County. Altho no nests or young were found, the following represent interesting records of rare or unusual birds present in the nesting season: J. B. Owen heard both Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-will's-



widows calling at Beaver Ridge in northern Knox County on June 21; the former is usually recorded only as a migrant. All of these records were made by J. C. Howell: three Scarlet Tanagers at Roaring Springs on June 20; two or three singing Black-throated Green Warblers in June and July near Norris, Anderson County; a Barn Owl on August 10 on Fort Loudon Lake.

Two unusual wandering birds were a Lark Sparrow observed by Mrs. R. A. Monroe on August 18 three miles northwest of Knoxville, the second record for this area, and a Piping Plover in the same area seen on August 17 by J. C. Howell. The Plover was feeding around some shallow pools formed by a heavy rain; this is the first time it has been recorded in this area, and apparently only the second record for Tennessee.

Probably the earliest fall migrant to appear, and an early record for the species, was a Spotted Sandpiper on July 12. Large flocks of Purple Martins were seen on August 3 and 9. The first August record we have for a Coot was made on August 7, and the second for a Semipalmated Plover in this month was on the 31st. Black Terns on August 7 at Fort Loudon Lake were the earliest that we have had reported. Most warbler fall migrants arrived at their usual times. A Mourning Warbler seen on Sept. 21 by Mrs. Monroe is the second record for fall migration. On the same day a Philadelphia Vireo was seen at very close range on Clinch Mountain, Union County, by J. T. Tanner, the only fall record for this species in this area.

The Knoxville Chapter held a Fall Field Day on Sept. 21 and recorded a total of 85 species in an area of fifteen miles diameter. — JAMES A. TANNER.

GREENEVILLE—June, July and the first half of August were the driest and hottest months Greene County has had in many years. However, the unusual weather had no noticeable effect on nesting or other activities of the birds in this area.

Yellow Warblers and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were unusually abundant during spring days. Other birds seemed to be in usual abundance.

This compiler, toward the last of August, was trimming shrubbery in his yard when he observed a Robin's nest of unusual thickness. Examination revealed a nest built on top of an older nest. The bottom nest contained egg-shell fragments and was distinctly a separate nest. Apparently both nests were built during the past summer, since the mud in the nests showed almost no weathering. This may not be unusual but had never been observed previously by him.

Dickcissels were first observed about ten years ago in the Lick Creek area near Albany by Willie Ruth Reed (now Mrs. Richard Nevius). The presence of Dickcissels in this area has been reported to THE MIGRANT the last two years. It has been assumed that they were nesting but no nests and no young could be found. Now we have three incidents of nesting to report for the past summer. On June 14, Mr. and Mrs. J. B.

White observed two adults with two immatures near the bridge across Lick Creek at Albany. One week later, June 20, the Whites returned to the same spot and saw two adults with two birds so young they could fly only a few feet at each effort. No nests were found. Also on June 20, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Nevius who live near Albany were observing a male Dickcissel in a meadow near their home. For several days he had been singing from various perches over an area having a 500 foot radius. However, he seemed to have one favorite perch and an attempt was made to locate the nest near this spot. During the effort the female was flushed but the nest could not be found. Mr. and Mrs. Nevius retreated from the spot and waited for the birds to return. After approximately 20 minutes the male returned to his perch and almost immediately the female returned and lit in a bunch of white weeds where she disappeared. The nest was found in the weeds about eight inches from the ground. It contained four bright blue eggs. Unfortunately the eggs were destroyed by agents unknown before they were hatched. The nest was constructed entirely of grass; the body of the nest was coarse while the lining was of very fine grass.

Last year, and again this year, near the last of August, large groups of Nighthawks have been observed in the Lick Creek valley. This may be a collecting area preceding migration.

A group of 8 American Egrets were observed August 17, on Cherokee Lake.—C. M. SHANKS, Tusculum, Tenn.

**KINGSPORT**—The past season in Kingsport was marked by unusual heat and drought. The weather, however, seemed to have no direct relation to the birds we have observed. There were renewed activity and spring-like singing for a few days after the rains came the second week in August.

In the second week of July the Kingsport Chapter made a casual census of nesting House Wrens, reporting fifteen nesting pairs in ten yards and gardens scattered over the southeastern section of town.

Altho our observations are too few to indicate trends, we feel that the numbers of Bewick's Wrens and Bachman's Sparrows are still declining. Water birds seem to be increasing; an unusual number of Little Green Herons have been seen and Little Blue Herons have been reported in larger numbers than usual during the last of August and as late as September 9. Fishermen bring in observations of small white "cranes" and herons which we assume to be immature Little Blues. A Blue-winged Teal was seen at the local fish hatchery Sept. 7, our earliest recorded date. I have tentatively identified a bird shot the latter part of August at the local commercial fish hatchery as a Caspian Tern; the marksman said that the tern appeared with a small flight of smaller "gulls" (probably terns). Several times during the summer—before, during, or after storms with heavy rain and wind—"gulls" have come in to the ponds of the hatchery. These reports are interesting as showing the possibility of observations of species heretofore wholly unrecorded from our area. With the impounding of our two new TVA lakes we hope to record increasing num-

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**The simple truth about birds is interesting enough;  
it is not necessary to go beyond it.**

bers of water birds.

Our calendar of the season shows the following dates on migrants: Bobolink, August 8 at old Pierce airport (our earliest previous date was Aug. 15 in 1949); Chestnut-sided Warbler, Aug. 24 and Sept. 4; Tennessee Warbler, Sept. 3; Cape May Warbler, Sept. 6 (first record as fall migrant); Blackburnian Warbler, Sept. 10 (earliest previous date, Sept. 12). Flocks of Robins were noticed gathering on lawns the first week in September and several large flocks of Nighthawks flying over areas where they do not occur as residents during the summer. — ANN HARNEY SWITZER.

### CORRECTION

In a review in THE MIGRANT, 1951:51, it was mentioned that up to 51 Fulvous Tree Ducks were seen at Lonoke, Ark., by R. Demett Smith, Jr., and others from Sept. 16, 1950, to Oct. 4, 1950. The latter date should have been Oct. 14, 1950.—Ben B. Coffey, Jr.

## NOTES HERE AND THERE

The Nashville Chapter has planned an ambitious program for 1952-53 with monthly field trips and meetings twice a month, with programs already planned for many of these meetings. Two Audubon Screen Tours are included in the schedule.

The Lebanon Chapter elected in July a new President, Millard C. Kent, and a new Secretary, Mrs. C. E. Couns.

Some of the chapters are actively engaged this fall in cooperating on various projects. Members of the Nashville and Knoxville Chapters are cooperating with many others in a widely-spread study of watching fall migration at night by means of a telescope pointed at the full moon. This project was briefly described in the last issue of THE MIGRANT. Members of all the East Tennessee chapters are visiting certain mountains again watching for migrant hawks.

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