

THE SONG PERIOD OF BIRDS OF NORTHWEST
ARKANSAS.

BY W. J. BAERG.

Introduction.

THE song period of most of our birds is in general perhaps fairly well known to ornithologists; however, but little seems to have been done to determine the relatively definite duration of these periods. The paper by H. J. Fry (Auk, 1916) and the table by C. S. Brimly in 'Birds of North Carolina' are apparently the only serious attempts recorded in the literature.

In an effort to bring together sufficient material for a course on the birds of Arkansas, offered at the University, definite records of the song period seemed almost as necessary as a list of the species occurring in the region.

The observations¹ on the song period were begun in 1924 and are still being continued. They are made on field trips taken, during the height of the song season (March to June), three or four times a week; during the remainder of the year, about once a week. Most of the trips are made in the morning, starting between seven and eight o'clock in the spring and summer and about nine o'clock in late fall and winter. The route for these trips is so outlined that it includes all the important localities that can be found in this part of the state. The route is varied slightly as time limits will permit, and as other circumstances make necessary or desirable. Along the route are: outskirts of the town, hawthorne-smilax thickets, relatively dry oak woods, tall elms and sycamores, small swampy areas, temporary rivulets, small permanent streams, roadside thickets, and general open fields and meadows. The usual distance covered varies between six and ten miles; on an average it is about eight miles.

In these observations no attempt has been made to determine whether the singing birds were unmated, or whether their nests had

¹ Mr. Frank R. Smith, student assistant, has made many of the observations recorded in this paper.

been broken up; the intention being merely to observe the duration of the song period of the various species in this locality.

The song period of the various birds does not, as is well known, begin suddenly and in full, but there is a more or less gradual increase in song and a corresponding decline. Both the beginning and the decline may be very gradual and extend over a month or even longer. In the first table I have tried to give the entire song period according to our observations.

Certain weather conditions, such as low temperature, wind, extreme heat, and drought are well known to have a depressing influence on song birds. It is hoped the observations here recorded have been made over a period of time sufficiently long to overcome this source of error, at least to a considerable degree. In spite of rather persistent and serious efforts, the records for some species are not as complete as would be desirable. Some birds occurred in too small numbers along the route, others apparently were somewhat irregular in their singing, or for other reasons were not heard.

In 1924 the records are lacking for a number of species, and for many others they are obviously incomplete. For other species they agree fairly well with records obtained later when a more serious attempt was made to determine, with as much exactness as possible, the entire duration of the song period.

The species listed in the tables include permanent residents, summer residents, winter residents, and transients.

TABLE I.
SONG PERIOD OF BIRDS.

Name	1924 (1)	1925	1926	1927	1928
Bob-white (?)			June 10-Oct. 22	July 3-Sept. 8	Apr. 28-Oct. 15
Mourning Dove		Mar. 15	Mar. 2-Sept. 6	Feb. 25-Sept. 2	Mar. 13-Sept. 2
Barred Owl			Feb. 13-Aug. 29	-Aug. 16	Feb. 26
Screech Owl		May 10-Sept. 22	-Sept. 6	May 22-Sept. 25	May 13-Sept. 2
Yellow-billed Cuckoo		-Oct. 25	May 1-Sept. 6	May 15-Sept. 1	-Oct. 15
Belted Kingfisher	Apr. 4-Nov. 30		Jan. 20-Dec. 29	Jan. 30-Dec. 25	Jan. 11
Flicker	Apr. 15	Apr. 14-July 28	Apr. 23-July 18	Apr. 16	Apr. 17-July 20
Chuck-will's Widow				June 2-Aug. 11	
Nighthawk				Apr. 18-Sept. 9	Apr. 17-Sept. 2
Crested Flycatcher	Apr. 24	Apr. 20	Apr. 29-Sept. 9	Mar. 12-Sept. 25	Mar. 11-Sept. 29
Phoebe		Mar. 8-Oct. 4	Mar. 28-Sept. 6	Apr. 30-Sept. 11	May 1-Sept. 16
Wood Pewee		May 8-Aug. 27	Apr. 28-Oct. 3	May 8-Aug. 11	May 1-Aug. 28
Acadian Flycatcher	May 18	May 19-July 26	June 4-July 31	May 1-June 26	May 1-May 19
Least Flycatcher			Feb. 7-Dec. 17	Jan. 30-Dec. 25	Feb. 15
Blue Jay		May 11	May 23	May 13-May 18	May 18
Bobolink			Feb. 7-June 18	-July 15	Mar. 23-Oct. 7
Red-winged Blackbird (?)	Mar. 28		Jan. 7-Dec. 26	Jan. 2-Dec. 25	Jan. 15
Meadowlark		Mar. 5-Nov. 1	Apr. 29-July 13	Apr. 21-July 26	Apr. 18-Aug. 11
Orchard Oriole		Apr. 23-July 12	Apr. 30	Apr. 24-May 21	Apr. 27-May 12
Baltimore Oriole	Apr. 25-May 2	May 8	Mar. 18-Apr. 21	Mar. 5-Apr. 3	Mar. 3-Apr. 11
Purple Finch	Mar. 22-Apr. 18	Feb. 15-Apr. 13	Mar. 21-Oct. 22	Jan. 30-Oct. 28	Mar. 23-Aug. 28
Goldfinch (?)		Mar. 25-Sept. 3	Mar. 28-Apr. 8		Mar. 14-Mar. 23
Vesper Sparrow		Apr. 12-July 11	Apr. 13-July 26	Apr. 11-July 20	Apr. 24-July 16
Lark Sparrow		-Apr. 19	Oct. 25	-Apr. 30	Oct. 28
Harris's Sparrow	Nov. 16	Nov. 5	Nov. 5	Oct. 28	Apr. 28
White-crowned Sparrow	-Apr. 25	Oct. 18	May 14	Oct. 15	May 6
White-throated Sparrow	-Apr. 25	Oct. 26	Oct. 22	May 8	Oct. 16
Tree Sparrow		Oct. 25	-May 7	Oct. 16	May 9
				Jan. 30-Mar. 27	

TABLE I—Continued.

Name	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928
Chipping Sparrow	Mar. 27–May 27	Mar. 17–July 19	Mar. 23–Aug. 10	Mar. 17–Aug. 11	Mar. 12–Aug. 21
Field Sparrow	Mar. 22–	Feb. 4–Sept. 11	Feb. 18–Aug. 29	Feb. 5–Sept. 18	Feb. 5–Sept. 14
Slate-colored Junco	Nov. 30–	Feb. 25–Mar. 27	Feb. 18–Mar. 28	Feb. 5–Mar. 6	Feb. 26–Apr. 1
Song Sparrow	Nov. 30–	Apr. 5 Nov. 1	Apr. 10 Oct. 22	Apr. 30 Oct. 22	Apr. 28
Fox Sparrow	Nov. 30–	Apr. 5 Oct. 18	Apr. 9 Nov. 5	Mar. 13 Oct. 19	Apr. 8
Towhee	Dec. 14–	Apr. 4–Aug. 20	Feb. 18–Aug. 13	Jan. 31–Sept. 1 (°)	Jan. 11–Aug. 28 (°)
Cardinal	Dec. 14–	Sept. 27 (°) Dec. 30	Aug. 25 Dec. 17–	Sept. 18 Dec. 24	Sept. 11
Blue Grosbeak	May 27–	Apr. 26–Aug. 5	May 7–Aug. 7	May 18–Aug. 11	May 10–Aug. 22
Indigo Bunting	Dicticissel	May 5–Aug. 27	May 1–Sept. 12 (°)	May 8–Sept. 27 (°)	Apr. 28–Sept. 2
Scarlet Tanager (°)	Apr. 27–	Apr. 26–Aug. 11	Apr. 30–July 31	Apr. 27–Aug. 11	May 1–Aug. 12
Summer Tanager	Apr. 27–June 10	Apr. 23–July 30	Apr. 28–Aug. 10	Apr. 20–Aug. 11	Apr. 21–Sept. 29
Loggerhead Shrike (°)	May 18–	Apr. 17–Aug. 20	Oct. 8–	Sept. 4–	Apr. 17–Sept. 2
Red-eyed Vireo	Apr. 20–	Apr. 24–May 20	Apr. 18–Aug. 29	Apr. 15–Aug. 24	Apr. 27–May 15
Warbling Vireo	White-eyed Vireo	Apr. 7–Sept. 17	Apr. 17–Sept. 19	Apr. 10–Sept. 11	Apr. 8–Sept. 16
Bell's Vireo	Black-and-white Warbler	Apr. 12–Sept. 17	Apr. 18–Sept. 19	Apr. 10–Sept. 25	Apr. 8–Sept. 16
Black-and-white Warbler	Blue-winged Warbler	May 3–Sept. 3	May 7–Sept. 6	Apr. 29–Sept. 4	May 1–Aug. 7
Blue-winged Warbler	Nashville Warbler	Mar. 27–July 12	Apr. 2–July 28	Apr. 15–July 31	Apr. 7–July 14
Nashville Warbler	Tennessee Warbler	Apr. 14–	Apr. 18–June 28	Apr. 10–June 21	Apr. 28–June 23
Tennessee Warbler	Parula Warbler	Apr. 23–May 11	Apr. 30–May 14	Apr. 8–May 7	May 1–May 10
Parula Warbler	Yellow Warbler	Apr. 4–May 17	Apr. 25–May 16	Apr. 17–May 19	Apr. 3–May 16
Yellow Warbler	Myrtle Warbler	Apr. 1–July 26	Apr. 9–Aug. 29	Mar. 27–Sept. 18	Apr. 1–July 25
Myrtle Warbler	Sycamore Warbler	Apr. 17–June 28	Apr. 17–July 16	Apr. 15–June 19	Apr. 24 (°)–July 20
Sycamore Warbler	Prairie Warbler	Apr. 3–Apr. 19	Apr. 9–July 10	Apr. 3–Apr. 30	Apr. 1–May 6
Prairie Warbler	Oven-bird	Apr. 5–June ?	Apr. 13–July 1	Mar. 27–July 4	Mar. 28–July 14
Oven-bird	Louisiana Water-Thrush	Apr. 23–Sept. 13	Apr. 18–July 16	Apr. 11–Sept. 12	Apr. 25 (°)–Aug. 31
Louisiana Water-Thrush	Kentucky Warbler	Apr. 17–Aug. 27 (°)	Mar. 29–Aug. 15	May 6–June 26 (°)	Apr. 21–June 30
Kentucky Warbler		Mar. 27–July 26	Apr. 30–July 13	Mar. 27–Aug. 18	Mar. 23–Aug. 14
		Apr. 19–Aug. 20	Apr. 30–July 13	Apr. 15–July 10	Apr. 25–July 20

TABLE I—Continued.

Name	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928
Maryland Yellow-throat		Apr. 14—July 26	Apr. 18—Aug. 7	Apr. 17—Aug. 18 ⁽¹⁾	Apr. 25 (8)—Aug. 26
Yellow-breasted Chat		Apr. 19—July 26	Apr. 29—Aug. 29	Apr. 16—Aug. 18	Apr. 25—July 23
Redstart		Apr. 19—Aug. 20	Apr. 21—Aug. 29	Apr. 19—July 10	Apr. 24 (8)—July 20
Mockingbird	May 3—Dec. 7	Jan. 31—Nov. 26	Mar. 5—Dec. 29	Jan. 3—Nov. 5	Feb. 5—Nov. 11
Catbird		Apr. 30—July 26	May 7—July 31	Apr. 22—July 24	Apr. 24—July 23 ⁽²⁾
Brown Thrasher	Mar. 30—	Mar. 22—July 13	Mar. 29—June 24	Mar. 19—July 6	Mar. 18—July 8
Carolina Wren		Jan. 12—Dec. 26	Jan. 7—Dec. 17	Jan. 1—Dec. 25	Jan. 6—
Bewick's Wren		Feb. 1—Oct. 12	Jan. 30—Nov. 10	Jan. 1—Oct. 9	Jan. 15—Oct. 14
House Wren		Apr. 16—May 5			Apr. 22—Apr. 28
White-breasted Nuthatch			May 14—Dec. 26	Apr. 26—Dec. 23	Feb. 5 (8)—
Tufted Titmouse			Feb. 28—Dec. 29	Jan. 1—Dec. 25	Jan. 8—
Chickadee			Jan. 30—Dec. 26	Jan. 1—Dec. 23	Feb. 5—
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Mar. 30—	Mar. 22—Apr. 17	Mar. 28—Apr. 25	Mar. 26—Apr. 24 ⁽³⁾	Mar. 23—May 1
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher ⁽⁴⁾			Apr. 2—June 18	Mar. 27—	Apr. 1—
Wood Thrush		Apr. 25—Aug. 3	Apr. 26—July 23	Apr. 14—Aug. 5	Apr. 21—Aug. 7
Olive-backed Thrush		Apr. 21—	Apr. 30—May 16	May 5—May 27	Apr. 22—May 6
Robin		Feb. 1—Sept. 24	Jan. 20—Oct. 22 ⁽⁴⁾	Jan. 31—Oct. 6	Jan. 11—Oct. 30 ⁽⁴⁾
Bluebird			Feb. 6—Dec. 29	Jan. 1—Nov. 5	Jan. 11—

¹ Records for 1924 are incomplete for many species.

² Incomplete records.

³ Records apply to song, not twitter.

⁴ Song heard once on October 2.

⁵ An unusually early record.

⁶ The Cardinal's song is but rarely heard in September. In 1928 it was heard several times in October.

⁷ Rarely heard in September.

⁸ Incomplete records.

⁹ Heard on these two dates and February 15, 1927.

¹⁰ An unusually late record.

¹¹ Song was heard also on September 1.

¹² Heard song on October 19.

¹³ The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher does not sing a great deal; as a rule it buzzes, or twitters.

¹⁴ Sang also on December 26.

¹⁵ The Catbird was heard singing on Sept. 16, 1928.

¹⁶ In the Robin roost, near Winslow, the song will probably be heard quite regularly during November, and possibly later.

The dates given in the preceding table represent, as a rule, the days when the birds were heard for the first time and the last time in the calendar year. The song period as given in the table includes early as well as late singers. No attempt is made to distinguish between the regular song period and a recrudescence of song.

It seems worth while to present in a separate table the periods when the more common song birds sing with a good deal of regularity, leaving out especially the late singers and those which are but seldom heard.

TABLE II.

AVERAGE SONG PERIOD.

Mourning Dove	March 1-September 1
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	May 15-September 20
Chuck-will's Widow	April 15-July 20
Phoebe	March 10-October 1
Wood Pewee	May 1-September 10
Meadowlark	All year
Orchard Oriole	April 22-July 15
Purple Finch	March 5-April 10
Goldfinch	March 20-October 20
Lark Sparrow	April 15-July 25
Harris's Sparrow	November 1-April 30
White-crowned Sparrow	October 20-May 1
White-throated Sparrow	October 20-May 1
Chipping Sparrow	March 20-August 10
Field Sparrow	February 10-September 15
Slate-colored Junco	February 5-April 1
Song Sparrow	October 25-April 10
Fox Sparrow	October 20-April 5
Towhee	February 10-August 15
Cardinal	January 1-September 1
Blue Grosbeak	May 1-August 10
Indigo Bunting	May 1-August 20
Dickcissel	April 28-August 10
Summer Tanager	April 25-August 10
Red-eyed Vireo	April 20-August 25
Warbling Vireo (Transient)	April 25-May 15
Yellow-throated Vireo	April 10-September 15
White-eyed Vireo	April 15-September 20
Bell's Vireo	May 5-September 5
Black and white Warbler	April 1-July 25
Blue-winged Warbler	April 15-June 25

TABLE II—*Continued.*

Nashville Warbler (Transient)	April 15–May 10
Tennessee Warbler (Tr.)	April 10–May 15
Parula Warbler	April 5–September 1
Yellow Warbler	April 18–July 10
Myrtle Warbler (Tr.)	April 5–April 25
Sycamore Warbler	April 1–July 10
Prairie Warbler	April 10–September 10
Oven-bird	April 20–July 15
Louisiana Water-Thrush	March 28–August 15
Kentucky Warbler	April 20–July 15
Maryland Yellow-throat	April 15–August 10
Yellow-breasted Chat	April 20–August 15
Redstart	April 20–August 20
Mockingbird	February 25–November 15
Catbird	April 25–July 25
Brown Thrasher	March 25–July 1
Carolina Wren	All year
Bewick's Wren	January 15–October 15
Tufted Titmouse	All year
Chickadee	All year
Ruby-crowned Kinglet (Tr.)	March 25–April 20
Wood Thrush	April 20–August 1
Olive-backed Thrush (Tr.)	May 1–May 20
Robin	January 15–October 20

For the Bob-white the records are incomplete. Although it is fairly numerous in Northwest Arkansas, the area covered by the field trips has but a few of them; so the records cannot be regarded as giving the whole song period.

The performance of the Blue Jay is perhaps not a high order of song. Whatever it is, it can be heard all through the year, and most frequently during the fall and winter months, provided the temperature is moderate.

The Meadowlark, as shown in the table, sings all through the year. During the months of August and September, it is heard less frequently than during the spring; but it is, nevertheless, by no means quiet. During December and January, it sings very freely whenever the weather is agreeable.

The Baltimore Oriole apparently does not nest in this region, or at least but rarely. It sings freely while migrating and is sometimes heard for about a month.

Purple Finches winter here in very small numbers, but of these winter residents I have no song records. Soon after migration has begun they may be heard in many places, singly and in chorus.

The song of the Goldfinch is heard at its best during March and April. Although it occurs here in relatively small numbers, its song is commonly heard until about the end of October.

Some of the various Sparrows that spend the winter here (Harris's, White-crowned, White-throated, Song, and Fox) begin to sing in the fall, presumably soon after their arrival, and may be heard on any warm winter day as well as regularly in spring until they leave for their nesting grounds.

The Cardinal begins singing late in December; after about two weeks he is in fairly good song, and from then on only zero weather will prevent him from singing. I have heard his clear notes coming from the top of a tall tree when the thermometer registered 8° F.

Scarlet Tanagers are rare here, a few pairs may be found on some of the higher Ozark hills. The records of the song period are incomplete.

The Loggerhead Shrike's song was heard on only two occasions, although there is evidence that he indulges in it perhaps frequently during the fall season. On one occasion his song was remarkably like that of the Mockingbird.

Warbling Vireos nest in some parts of Arkansas. I have observed them in the southeastern part, Lake Village, but in the northwestern part of the state they have not been found nesting.

The Mockingbird may be heard occasionally all through the winter, but it is not until late in February that it sings with considerable regularity, and continues all through the spring and summer. Even in August and September it may be heard every day.

As a dependable and regular singer, the Carolina Wren holds first place. Only on the very worst winter days does it forget or neglect to sing. And late in August when most of the birds have become silent it is as full of song as in spring.

The Chickadee, as is well known, chatters a good deal, probably all through the year. The periods given in the table refer to the spring song of the Chickadee. Although this is not heard with equal frequency all through the year, it can be heard several times every month of the year.

For the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher the records are incomplete. It nests here in considerable numbers, and the buzzing note may be heard almost anywhere in the woods. Its song is not so often heard.

The Robin winters here in small numbers. Apparently the earliest singing is done by winter residents. The early morning chorus begins later, when the Robins become more numerous, about February 10. During August and September the song is quite frequently and regularly heard.

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