

BIRD NOTES OF A STORMY MAY IN COLORADO SPRINGS

By EDWARD R. WARREN

WITH ONE PHOTO

THE MONTH of May, 1917, in Colorado Springs, was, apparently in common with the rest of the country, an abnormally cold, stormy one. Many cloudy or partly cloudy days, with low temperatures and much rain and even snow, prevailed all through the month. Once the maximum temperature was above 80—81, on the 16th. On the 15th, 17th and 18th the maximums were 77, 76 and 76, respectively. On no other day did the thermometer go above 70. The lowest minimum was 22, the highest 51, the latter on the 18th.



Fig. 17. SCENE IN MONUMENT VALLEY PARK, COLORADO SPRINGS, MAY 5, 1917.
LESSER SCAUP DUCKS IN FOREGROUND.

I had not been devoting as much time as usual in April to bird work; but when, on the morning of May 5, I woke up and found some eight inches of heavy wet snow on the ground, I decided it was time to see what was going on among the birds. I knew this storm, coming at the migrating season, might cause suffering, and there was a possibility it might also make delay in the arrival of some of the species. About my house the most noticeable thing was the great number of Robins, these searching for worms wherever they might luckily find a bare spot. The snow was so saturated with water that it melted readily, and the plight of our red-breasted friends was thus not as bad as it might have been, though many of them evidently thought it bad enough, as

they perched in the snow-laden trees with their plumage fluffed out to its fullest extent trying to keep warm.

It was the middle of the forenoon before I could leave home to visit the Monument Valley Park a short distance away. By this time the roadways were getting bare, and were surfaced with mud and water, though our gravelly soil does not usually make much mud. On my way to the park in these roadways I found Meadowlarks, and Vesper, Lark and Chipping Sparrows (the western form of each, of course) busily seeking food, and evidently finding it, judging from their actions. Arriving at the park I found an expanse of white; none of the paths had been broken, and few or no foot passengers had been along. Brewer Blackbirds were about, White-crowned Sparrows were perched in trees and bushes; they did not appear to care about going out to rustle in the bare roadways.

It was about a small pond that there was the greatest amount of life. On the water were seven Lesser Scaups, and they were quite unconcerned, feeding or swimming about or preening themselves as they chose. A little later in the morning I also saw Gadwalls, Shovelers and Baldpates; altogether there were some twenty odd ducks on the pond at one time. Along the shores of the pond Say Phoebes were abundant, continually flying out over the water after insects, though one would have thought it a mighty poor day for flycatching. Myrtle Warblers were also common and emulating the efforts of the Phoebes, though also working the bushes and ground along the shore. A Kingfisher was also there, occasionally dropping into the water with a splash. For such a wintry scene, bird life was decidedly abundant and active. Besides the Myrtles a few Orange-crowned and Audubon Warblers were present, the former confining their activities to the trunks and branches of the trees which they were carefully working. I ought to state that it is really very unusual for Myrtle Warblers to be so abundant here. I have never before seen as many as on this occasion, and usually the seasons slip by without any being noted. A Western Yellowthroat was also on the warbler list.

A little way from the pond, and on the bench above it, is a reservoir belonging to the park. On this were four Lesser Scaups and eight Wilson Phalaropes, and along the shores were more Say Phoebes and Myrtle Warblers; while flying about over the water were several Rough-winged and Barn Swallows, which looked rather unseasonable; for there was a cold north wind with flying snow. I traversed a fair portion of the park that morning, and in the afternoon walked the whole length of it, some two miles. One bird which was noticeable was the Townsend Solitaire, of which I saw several, though it is usually rare in the park. I subsequently saw one or more on my almost daily visits until the 17th of May.

The beautiful Mountain Bluebirds were present in flocks. It is possible these spring storms bring more suffering to this species than to almost any other, they seeming to have much difficulty in obtaining food when snow is on the ground.

The following day was cloudy and bird conditions much the same, though the snow had largely melted. Snow was falling and melting almost all the day of the 8th, and birds were working hard for food. Another little flock of Phalaropes was at the reservoir and a flock of Chestnut-backed Bluebirds was in the park in addition to the other species. The latter were also seen the next day which opened with an inch of snow on the ground and was cloudy most of the time.

On every one of these days a little flock of Lesser Scaups was on the pond, apparently the same birds, as there were five males and two or three females. These birds were quite tame, that is, they paid little attention to anyone, and fed and swam about unconcernedly. The occasional Gadwalls and Spoonbills were much shyer and disliked having people about, often leaving when passersby approached. The morning of the 10th I found three Wilson Phalaropes on the pond with the ducks. They were apparently feeding on insects flying close to the surface of the water, as the birds swam about with heads up and bills open, making darts here and there as if catching something. I did not see one take anything from the surface during the considerable time I watched. Though they kept quite well out from the shore most of the time, it did not appear to be from fear, as they occasionally came boldly quite close to where I was. A female Black-crowned Night Heron was seen then and was noted off and on for several days, usually about one particular grove of cottonwoods. To my great surprise I saw a male Evening Grosbeak, usually only a winter visitant, and an irregular one at that; I saw none the preceding winter, nor did I hear of any about town.

The following day, the 11th, the first Black-headed Grosbeaks and House Wrens were seen, the latter about a nesting site which has been used for several years. The Grosbeaks were about on time, but the Wrens were a trifle late; I think they commonly arrive from three to six days earlier than this. From this date on for a week or more the weather improved somewhat until the little hot spell from the 15th to the 18th was past; then more bad weather set in, lasting until the end of the month.

On the 13th the first Green-tailed Towhees and Yellow Warblers were noted. The former should have been here by May 1 and the latter by the 7th. This day was also somewhat notable as being the first when the Scaups were not on the pond, nor were they seen again, though Gadwalls were noted on the 15th. On the 14th Clay-colored and Brewer Sparrows were about in considerable numbers. An Arkansas Kingbird was seen. I had thought possibly I saw one on the 5th; if I did, the bird thought it wiser to go south again. The present date is just a bit late. The first Catbird was also seen, the date being about normal.

No Say Phoebes were seen about the park after the 9th. As soon as the weather had moderated so that they could obtain food almost anywhere they evidently scattered to their usual haunts. On the 15th the first Kingbird was observed, like the Arkansas, a bit late. The first Bullock Oriole, about five days late. A Red-headed Woodpecker was seen on the 17th, somewhere about the normal date for the species.

When we come to analyze the above data it would appear that six species, namely, Kingbird, Arkansas Kingbird, Bullock Oriole, Green-tailed Towhee, Yellow Warbler and House Wren, were all late in arriving, with the possible exception of the Arkansas Kingbird, while the Red-headed Woodpecker and Catbird came about on time; but their normal arrival dates being toward the middle of the month they would not be as apt to be affected by the storm. These delayed species may have met the storm and cold weather to the south of here and waited, and then come on when the conditions improved, which was the case when they finally did come. Observations over a larger territory in the region would have been better, for there are several species of birds which visit the park only occasionally and usually not on their first arrival, but straggle there later.

Aside from the migrations, the most interesting observations, I think, were on the Say Phoebes, which stayed about feeding on insects over the surface of the water, and then disappeared as soon as the weather became fairly good. The little flock of Scaups staying so long on the pond was also somewhat remarkable. As I have remarked above, the number of Myrtle Warblers was extremely unusual.

Colorado Springs, Colorado, January 6, 1919.

LOSSES SUFFERED BY BREEDING BIRDS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By H. ARDEN EDWARDS

ANY EFFORTS at estimating the probable increase or decrease of our native birds must take into consideration the very considerable loss sustained by them during their breeding season. A record of such known losses shows a surprising percentage of eggs and young birds destroyed during any one year, and the careful observer will at once notice a certain number of contributing causes which are fairly constant.

Taking these different factors in the order of their importance, we find that predatory mammals and birds hold first place. Preëminent among mammals is the common house cat; but the weasels, skunks, and coyotes also figure importantly. When I write predatory bird, my mind does not picture at once some noble falcon or swift flying raptor, but rather that skulking robber of the woodlands, the California Jay. Next as causes of loss come the rare storms of wind and rain, which, while of short duration, bring widespread damage, especially to nests and eggs. Thirdly, there is the ignorance and carelessness of man, which adds no small amount of destruction to the general total. And lastly, we may include the partial sterility of the birds themselves. I say partial, as I have never come across an instance where an entire clutch of eggs was lost from this cause.

To return to the first factor, we will naturally expect to see the preponderance of effect exerted here. Nature is always destructive in a constructive sense. Everything is sooner or later destroyed that something else may live. Death is written large upon every bird. The blossom only fulfills its purpose when it has faded and made way for the perpetuating seeds. So it is in bird life also; a bird may fulfill a purpose when it furnishes a meal for a wild animal; but when it falls prey to a tame cat, I fear Nature has been cheated.

Nature surely intends that no one species shall prey to excess upon some other species; therefore, the specialization which is evolved in the way of protective coloration, and defensive organs and habits. Take, as a specific instance, the orioles. The South American branches of this family have developed some remarkable methods of defense, such as that of the Caciques—which suspend their nests only in trees containing the nests of a very pugnacious species of wasp. Gadow tells us that in Mexico certain orioles have learned to tie their nests to the telegraph wires, where it is almost impossible for anything without wings to reach them. Our own North American species of oriole have learned to construct nests which insure a degree of safety, even from the marauding owl.