

136. *Chaetura pelagica*—Chimney Swift.

A rather unusual summer visitor about St. Marks. Farther inland more numerous, but I have not found it abundant at any place in our county. Local name, "Bat" and "Chimney Bat." March 31, 1915, September 17, 1914, October 22, 1917.

137. *Archilocus colubris*—Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

While never occurring in numbers we have this dainty sprite regularly during the warmer months. April 3, 1915, October 8, 1915.

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 BLUEBIRD MIGRATIONS — 1917.

BY HOWARD CLARK BROWN

On March thirteenth, 1917, there appeared in the Charles City Daily Press of Charles City, Iowa, a notice that the Califor Naturalist Club of that city had established a bird bureau. The notice read that the Naturalist club, in order that it might know when the various spring birds arrived that year, had established a bird bureau to which all information concerning birds might be reported. It was felt that if all observers would only report their observations to a single compiling bureau much might be accomplished in learning the routes of migration and the time of first arrivals, etc., which would else be lost. The plan had been adopted because each year the club had felt the need for some sort of concentration of just such material as came to them from varied sources at all manner of inconvenient times. And thus it happened that two members of the organization took it upon themselves to keep the records for the community. The telephone numbers of these two members were published in the daily paper and all sorts of birds notes were asked for. The result was astonishing. It was found that the responses from every side were unusually eager. Since that date of establishment of the bureau, each year has seen an added interest in its work, and each year has added new observers. Hundreds of bird notes have been reported to the bureau. As yet, no single printed record has been issued to tell of the

work of the bureau. The only articles which have concerned it at all have been those contributed to the daily press of Charles City whenever any unusual report has come in. Of the many phases of interest in connection with this work and of its scientific value one might well write at length. I wish here, however, to mention only one of the many unusual and interesting days in the history of the bureau.

There has never been published in our part of the state any record of bluebird migration which has been as complete and detailed as that record which was taken by the bureau in 1917. We have never had any other year which compared with that in point of numbers or concentration of migrating bluebirds. I do not know whether the migrants chose a new route that year and thus struck Charles City for the first time within our recorded years, or whether the weather conditions or some manner of disturbance in the place from which they came compelled them to amass and make their northward flight in more concentrated fashion than was their custom. I only know that March 14, 1917, shall go down in the history of the Bird Bureau and in all written bird records of our part of the state, as "Bluebird Day." Before coming to the actual reports of that day we must investigate the conditions leading up to the event.

The first bluebird record for that year was reported on February twenty-fifth by Dr. E. P. Hummel.<sup>1</sup> On that date, a single bluebird was seen four miles East of Charles City. The first part of March seems to have been a continuous change of freezing and thawing, with no very cold weather. March sixth is recorded as cloudy, puddles in the street and considerable thawing. On the seventh there was ice everywhere. On the eighth the weather was mild and by the ninth ice was again thawing. My record for the tenth reads as follows: "Snow deep in places. Water

<sup>1</sup>Reported in notes of Mrs. Mary A. Dutton, Bird Bureau Recorder.

everywhere. Heard half a dozen bluebirds while on tramp this A. M.”<sup>2</sup> On the eleventh I was again on a tramp and saw a flock of forty or more. Most of the snow was gone by that date. Some of the ice in the river was also going down stream. It snowed nearly all day the twelfth but the temperature remained high. On the fourteenth I find the following comment: “Part of last night and this morning six to eight inches of damp snow fell here and the weather has turned considerably colder.”<sup>3</sup> This, then, is the sort of background which we secured for the Bluebird day which brought such splendid records. That February twenty-fifth is an unusually early date for the appearance of the bluebird, is commented upon in a report from the Califor Naturalist Club which appeared in its bird notes in the local press. In 1914, the first bluebird was reported on March seventh. In 1915, March twenty-seventh was the first date of appearance, and in 1916, March twelve. March third, 1918, and March sixteen, 1919, completes our record of first appearances.

On the fourteenth of March, 1917, the first day after the article soliciting bird records appeared in the local press, eighteen different observers reported bluebirds. One flock which was estimated to consist of at least two hundred individuals was reported from northwest of town. Another which was reported by several observers and which contained about one hundred birds passed through the city about mid-day, flying toward the river. On March ninth, a large flock of bluebirds was reported some nine miles south-east of town by Mrs. H. E. Winterink. The location of this flock was significant because it was in a region of moderately dense woods where much food might be obtained. Also, it was not far from the river. There seems to be sufficient evidence that the migrating birds of this region follow the river to a far greater extent than we

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Daily Record of H. Brown for March 10, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> Note in report of Mrs. Ella E. Webster, Bird Bureau Recorder.

realized when we first began our work. That this large flock should be any one of the large ones discovered following the course of the river on the fourteenth can not be definitely stated. It is possible that the birds found plenty in that wood so that they remained for a number of days, and then continued in their flight when a warmer day appeared. It is of interest to note that the first records of migrants invariably come from locations near the river or from woods but a little distance from the stream. On March fourteenth, Mr. C. L. Webster, living only a block from the Cedar River, in the South-eastern migration path, reported a large flock of bluebirds which remained for some time in that vicinity. At noon of the same day a flock, of which eighty-two were definitely counted by Master Harold Fredrickson, was seen in the central portion of town, not more than three blocks from the river, but seemingly headed for an inland route by which they would cut off a peculiar bend in the river and reach a swampy portion and big wood beyond. About this same time of day reports came from five different sources of scattered pairs or small flocks of bluebirds in the same general part of town. All of these sources might have been in the migration from the direction which the larger flocks seemed to take. Two reports had come of flocks seen very early in the morning of this same day, but they were both of moderately small numbers. As the day progressed we found that the flock which had been reported at noon in the central part of town had evidently reached the end of the cut-off which they made in going through the city rather than following the river direct. There was a flock of some fifty or more seen at the end of this land route. Then, still later in the day as evidenced by the sequence of the records of the bureau, a report came from the edge of some woods located some three miles to the North-west of Charles City, of a flock of probably two hundred individuals which was seen flying over the site of a last year's garden. Some of the flock paused and made a meal of asparagus berries

which were still left from the preceding year. Thus, within the time from eight A. M. until very late in the afternoon the bluebird record was reported. The eight o'clock record of the morning was of interest in that some birds were then past the city and were seen going in a northwesterly direction.

There were several evidences that the birds were hungry for they were reported by several observers as stopping long enough to pick up some dried berries, or other seed food.

The reason for the comparatively long pause in going through the city may be found, I think, in the protection which the buildings offered. The very early date of their arrival may explain their deliberateness in proceeding.

On March fifteenth, the record tells us that the sun was shining brightly, and that the mercury stood at twenty above zero.<sup>1</sup> On the sixteenth, there was quite a different report. "A howling blizzard. 9:30 A. M. mercury thirty degrees above zero. There had been four telephone calls from persons solicitous for the welfare of the birds."<sup>1</sup> We find on that date that three persons reported bluebirds seen, but only stray individuals; no flocks were recorded at all. At twelve-thirty P. M. Master Harold Fredrickson and his sister went in the blizzard to several evergreen outposts which are located on a point of the riverbank directly in the migration route which we have followed. They expected that there might be some small birds there which would need food. But when they reached the spot a large marsh hawk flew from one of the trees. On the way to school, these observers saw several bluebirds seeking shelter in an evergreen.

Later records for the bluebird during this same season are to be found in the same notes. On March twentieth Harold Fredrickson reported finding three dead bluebirds near a brick school building against which I presume they had been dashed by the violence of the blizzard. The day

<sup>1</sup> From Record of Mrs. Mary Dutton, Bureau Recorder.

following seems to have been a secondary climax in the migrations. Three observers reported them on this date. It had now become beautiful weather again, water was everywhere and Winter seemed really to have lost his hold. A flock of one hundred-fifty bluebirds was seen by Mrs. Ella Webster at her home on the river bank, and Mr. Harold Newton saw a flock of one hundred individuals on the same day. After this the new order was introduced; for the robins, meadowlarks and red-wings came, then Winter had surely gone and Spring had arrived.

There is a beautiful prophetic spirit in the appearance of the bluebird so very early, before man has even dared to dream that Spring is at hand. Each year we welcome this bird with more grateful hearts than on the year preceding.

There is one other note which I wish to include in this article, not because it belongs in a bluebird account, but because it seems to be linked in its inexplicable peculiarity with this early bluebird migration.

On March sixteenth of this same year, 1917, Miss Harriet Clark reported a rose-breasted grosbeak. This is the earliest record for the grosbeak which Floyd county has ever had. The bird was seen again by the same observer on the eighteenth. For some five or more years a pair of these birds had a nest in an apple tree in Miss Clark's yard. Each year the family had been watched with the greatest interest. It was near this same location that this early arrival was discovered in 1917. Just what happened to the bird when the blizzard came on of course we do not know but the fact that the nest in the apple tree was not completed that year leads one to the belief that a tragedy, which only Winter could be held accountable for, was the result of the sweet singer's early arrival.

Within a week from the time that the notice first appeared in the daily press, asking for bird notes, fifty-three reports reached the bureau. These were given by thirty-six different observers, of which not more than a dozen

were club members or associated in any way with its former work. Since that time of course many new people have joined in the work and the notes are yearly growing more valuable.

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## A SYNOPSIS OF THE GENUS THRYOMANES

BY HARRY C. OBERHOLSER

Since the publication of the writer's revision of the genus *Thryomanes*,<sup>1</sup> additional data concerning the geographic distribution, status, and relationships of several of the forms have been accumulating. Some of these have already been published by Mr. H. S. Swarth, in his excellent article on the Pacific Coast races of *Thryomanes bewickii*,<sup>2</sup> and by Mr. Robert Ridgway in his treatment of the genus in the "Birds of North and Middle America."<sup>3</sup> The remainder we purpose to present here, together with, for convenience, a brief synopsis of all the forms of the genus, including a revision of their geographic distribution. For detailed descriptions and comparisons the three contributions above mentioned should be consulted. We are much indebted to Dr. J. Grinnell and Mr. H. S. Swarth for the loan of material from the Pacific coast region.

The genus *Thryomanes* at present consists of four species, one of these, *Thryomanes bewickii*, comprising 16 geographic races, one of which we are here describing as new.

### Genus THRYOMANES Sclater.

*Thryomanes* Sclater, Cat. Coll. Amer. Birds, May, 1862, p. 22 (subgenus of *Thryothorus*).

*Type*.—*Troglodytes bewickii* Audubon, by original designation.

<sup>1</sup>Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., XXI, Nov. 19, 1898, pp. 421-450.

<sup>2</sup>Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., ser. 4., VI, No. 4, May 8, 1916, pp. 53-85, pl. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus., No. 50, pt. 3, 1904, pp. 548-569.