

IN THE HAUNTS OF CAIRN'S WARBLER—A RETROSPECT AND  
A COMPARISON\*

BY G. EIFRIG

The locality under discussion is Accident, Garrett County, Maryland, and its vicinity. Garrett is the westernmost and the most elevated county in Maryland. The mountains cross the county from southwest to northeast. They are not so conspicuous for their height, but rather for their long, unbroken contour or crest, which at the same time is broad. Even before the lumberman's ax desecrated this garden spot, there were numerous open, grassy places, called glades, on the forest-covered crests, which then invited and now have partly given way to farms. The mountains to the east of Accident are Negro, Meadow, Great Backbone Mountains, the last continued northwardly by the Big Savage, on the eastern slope of which Frostburg is situated.

The region is much dissected by ravines eroded by the rivers and creeks. Some of the drainage goes into the Youghiogheny, a tributary of the Monongahela, which, in turn, empties into the Ohio, and eventually into the Gulf of Mexico, the remainder into the Potomac, and with it into the Atlantic. These creekbeds, usually lined with fine old hemlocks and dense thickets of rhododendron are the typical home of Cairn's Warbler, also on the tops of the mountains wherever hemlocks and rhododendrons are. This is the combination: Cairn's Warbler is found wherever rhododendron grows; this as a rule grows only where hemlock is found, and that is always along or near water.

Although the elevations above sea-level are not so great, the effect on flora and fauna is most remarkable. The geological survey plug in front of my hosts' house in the village of Accident shows 2395 feet, while that on George's Hill nearby gives 3004 feet. Thus the fauna and flora is a mixture of Carolinian, Transition, and Canadian. That is what makes the region so fascinating to the naturalist. Almost side by side with such northerly species of trees as hemlock and white spruce are found the tulip and cucumber trees, members of the magnolia family; also sassafras, flowering dogwood, and witch hazel; and in the lowest part of the course of Big Bear Creek, near Friendsville, on my last visit this past summer (1928) I found for the first time Hercules club (*Aralia spinosa*); also, on the Great Backbone across

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\*This paper was written five years ago. Last year another change for the worse took place, the death of my friend, companion, and guide, Mr. Fred Burkhard. He was a keen observer, and a lover of nature. G. E.

the boundary in West Virginia, the pipe vine, *Aristolochia macrophylla*, the northern *Oxalis acetosella* and the southerly *stricta*, *Clin-tonia borealis* and *umbellata*. Many species of oak and maple are here, also several lady-slippers, habernaria, cranberry, and sundew.

This mixture of northern and southern species is just as apparent, or more so, in the fauna, especially the avifauna. The same stream may harbor the Louisiana and the Northern Water-Thrushes as breeding birds, and the Bewick's and Winter Wrens, the Golden-winged and the Canada Warblers. I have never seen the Canada Warbler anywhere in Canada as numerous as in certain spots in these mountains. The same is almost, if not quite, true of the Magnolia and Blackburnian Warblers. The following shows the striking effects of such a relatively small altitude in this latitude. There may be much snow, with a long time of sleigh-riding, and much sub-zero weather at Accident and even Frostburg, the latter only twelve miles from Cumberland, while at the last-named place there is no snow all winter, or not much of it, and mild weather throughout. Here the principal breeding warblers are the Prairie, Hooded, and Worm-eating, none of which are ever seen at Accident. Cumberland has an elevation of 750 feet.

I have been going to Accident off and on since 1901. Not much change is observable. That is what makes it so attractive and restful to me. No shrieking, puffing locomotive here, for there is no railway. The narrow gauge that ran from Friendsville along Big Bear Creek up to Meadow Mountain has long since fallen into decay. Owing to inaccessibility or to the love of some owners for their fine old trees—ancestral heirlooms in most cases—lumber companies did not get all the fine old hemlocks and white spruce, no doubt much to their disgust. A fine new, hard, highway has been built through the valley from Oakland to the old Cumberland Pike at Keyser's Ridge. The only changes I noticed this past summer (1928) were these: electric light had been introduced, the Starlings had established themselves, and the chestnut blight had killed most of the chestnut trees on the rocky mountain tops and sides. But even these wounds have been beneficently healed over by Mother Nature.

Now as to the birds of the region. The last visit was the first one since 1920. One will, under such conditions, naturally make comparisons. The results will, in this case, not be simply imagination, as I have made it a habit for many years to record the number of birds of each species seen during a walk.

Waterbirds are few and far between here. This is to be expected, because beside the usually narrow runs and creeks, flowing in steep-sided little valleys or even gullies, there are no water-bodies, with the exception of two small artificial ponds. Here is where Killdeer and Spotted Sandpipers breed, a Green Heron on Big Bear Creek. This condition is being changed, however, owing to the construction of a dam on Deep Creek for power purposes, which has resulted in a large lake, about twelve miles from Accident, where gulls and ducks have already been seen.

Of gallinaceous birds there are only the Ruffed Grouse and the Bob-white; the former has decreased, the latter increased in numbers in the last eight years. The Wild Turkey has disappeared since the time of my first visits.

There are few birds of prey, largely because the natives have a strong antipathy to them and shoot as many as they can. Still I know of one place on Negro Mountain where a pair of redtails may be seen year after year. At another place a pair of sharpshins has been holding forth for ten years, and were there at my last visit, much to the disgust of nearby Kingbirds, whom I have seen darting at one while fairly screaming with rage. The Sparrow Hawk had at this last visit disappeared from its accustomed haunts.

The Mourning Dove breeds sparingly. Both cuckoos are regular breeders. A nearly full-grown Black-billed Cuckoo I saw on my last visit had whitish edgings to the feathers of the tail and back and thus looked remarkably like an European Cuckoo.

Of woodpeckers the Flicker is the most common. Formerly it was the red-head, but this has strangely almost disappeared. What can be the reason? There are no longer quite so many dead trees in the clearings, but there are still enough to go around. Also the fine cherry trees are still there. So why should they have become so rare? What hidden influences are at work in nature that work for the increase or decrease of species of animals or plants and even eliminate some entirely? We do not seem to be making much headway in that line of investigation. The fine Pileated Woodpecker is still found in one place on Negro Mountain, his hold on existence being evidently precarious. The Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers occur, but by no means as numerous as one would expect in such a relatively heavily wooded region. The northerly Yellow-bellied Sapsucker comes as a distinct surprise in a region as far south as Maryland; it can be found every summer and all summer on Negro Mountain, and probably in other suitable places.

The Nighthawk can be seen circling overhead in small numbers here and there, but the Whip-poor-will has almost gone entirely. The same condition I find to be true wherever I go and where it was formerly common. What can be happening to this fine species? I have heard of a few places where they are just as numerous as before, if not more so. I hope there are many such. Chimney Swifts and hummingbirds are here, of the latter I have found a nest with young.

In my journal of 1918 I find this entry made during my visit at Accident: "Every orchard has a pair of Chebecs, and every second one a pair of Kingbirds and Baltimore Orioles." This had distinctly changed for the worse in 1928, when I saw no Least Flycatchers at all, and fewer Kingbirds and Orioles. The Wood Pewee is common and the Phoebe was formerly, but is no longer. Of the Phoebe the same remarks hold good as of the Whip-poor-will. This year even the old wooden bridge or culvert over Big Bear Creek, near Kaese's mill did not harbor a pair, where in other years one could always be sure of finding one. What is happening to them?

The Prairie Horned Lark is still found breeding in a few places. This part of Maryland is probably the only one where it is found as a breeding species. At Cumberland it is only a migrant.

The crow and jay family is not strongly represented here. Blue Jays are common enough, as indeed they seem to be everywhere, but the crow is far from plentiful.

Of the blackbirds and Starlings only the Bronzed Grackle which seems here to be intermediate between this species and the Purple Grackle, can be called common or even abundant. Wherever there is a little alluvial, swampy tract along a creek, the redwing is certain to be found, as on the swampy, alder-covered glades on Negro Mountain, and on Big Bear Creek. Here I once found a nest of a pair in an apple tree twenty feet up. The Baltimore Oriole has decreased in numbers, the Cowbird holds its own, unfortunately, and the Bobolink is nesting in small colonies in timothy fields. It is, if anything, increasing in numbers, which is rather astonishing for a state as far south as Maryland. It does not think of nesting near Cumberland. The Meadowlark is only moderately common.

An unwelcome addition has appeared here in the Starling. There was a band of about forty roving about. They were feeding in a newly-cut hayfield, then in cherry trees that had not been picked. When flying overhead, they can at once be told by their short tail, which is quite different from that of any of our blackbirds, and by their rapid flight. I tried to get a few specimens, but found them

extremely wary and unapproachable. Later, in Cumberland, I found them voraciously feeding on pears in the garden of my host, where I could have gotten some easily. The way they slashed into those pears, not troubling about finishing up such as dropped to the ground, seems to me to spell trouble to fruit-growers in the future, if they become plentiful, which seems probable.

The finch and sparrow family is well represented here. The Chipping Sparrow and the Song Sparrow are dooryard birds, breeding in every garden. The song of the Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows can be heard wherever the roads wind through fields. In the low, warmer hollows the Cardinal is even represented there and on the hills the Indigobird as well. The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is not too rare a breeder. The Goldfinch was extremely abundant in 1928; one was hardly ever out of hearing of its voice. This species is distinctly on the increase wherever I have been in the last two or three years, in Illinois, Indiana, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. That the Swamp Sparrow is found here comes in the nature of a surprise. They are found only in the cold, swampy glades on Negro Mountain and near Oakland.

The most interesting finch of the region, however, is undoubtedly the Carolina Junco. This lives and breeds from an elevation of about 2500 feet up, in dark, mossy hemlock banks as well as in the high, dry, rocky stands of chestnut, which latter are rapidly being replaced by other second growth, as we have seen above. Their appearance and song is exactly like that of *Junco hyemalis*, but the tail noticeably averages a little longer. One I saw and heard on my last visit had an entirely different song in this wise: *la la la la la* (loud and musical) *dree dree dree*, the last rasping and warbler-like. There were several warblers breeding in that immediate vicinity, so it got this song probably by imitation. The young are heavily streaked above and below.

Barn and Cliff Swallows are common, the latter even more than the former. Long lines of old and young of both species were strung out on telephone wires, while I was trying to stalk the Starlings. One large nesting place of former years on a certain barn had, however, been deserted by the Cliff Swallows, perhaps due to depredations of English Sparrows, who wanted to use their nests for their own families. Near Oakland I once saw a breeding pair of Tree Swallows. I did not notice any Purple Martins during any of my last visits, but there was a large colony of them at Cove, about four miles north of

Accident, and there are many at Frostburg, on the slope of Big Savage Mountain, twenty-five miles away.

Cedar Waxwings are common, shrikes absent, and of vireos only the Red-eyed, which tries to make up by its numbers the lack of the others. Just once I saw the Yellow-throated Vireo.

It is the warblers that are a revelation to anyone first visiting this region. They were to me at any rate. I thought I had been suddenly transported to Canada. There were and are there now the Black-throated Blue (which later turned out to be Cairn's) and Green, the Magnolia, the Blackburnian, and the Canada Warblers, the Northern Water-Thrush, beside such wider-ranging ones as the Parula, Maryland Yellow-throat, Chestnut-sided, Yellow, and Oven-bird; also more southerly ones as the Louisiana Water-Thrush, Golden-winged Warbler, and even the Chat, which was here one year only. At my last visit this year, the warblers gave me another surprise by their greatly diminished numbers. Thus, where I had seen twenty Canadas in 1918, there was this year only one; on Negro Mountain where in 1918 I counted twelve, there were none this year. The Magnolia stands ten to three, the Chestnut-sided fifty to three, Cairn's ten to four. Again, why this difference? Was it on account of the cold, wet spring they had this year? That is not improbable. My host had found several dead Flickers after a snow-storm they had in April. If such hardy birds succumb, how much more the tender warblers? But for all we know there may be entirely different forces and influences at work that make the numbers of birds fluctuate so strangely.

Of thrashers, the Catbird is common, the Brown Thrasher much less so. Wrens are represented by the House Wren and Bewick's Wren. The former seems to be increasing, the latter decreasing in numbers. I suspect that in this case the presence of the former is the reason for the decrease of the latter. Once only did I find the Winter Wren breeding, and that in a place which seems to be a bit of Canada bodily transported here—a stand of original hemlock and white spruce on Negro Mountain. There also the Blackburnian Warbler is in its glory.

The White-breasted Nuthatch is not common, not even the Chickadee. The Tufted Titmouse, so common at Cumberland, is entirely absent here.

Of thrushes the Veery was always common, locally even abundant. On the mountain crests and sides, as well as in the ravines one would every few steps hear their querulous alarm note. This year we did not see one, although we searched for them. How can

that be accounted for? Neither did we see or hear a single Wood Thrush. The Robins, on the contrary, are becoming more numerous—thirty years ago there were few here—and the Bluebirds are holding their own. On George's hill we came across a band of twenty to thirty Bluebirds busily feeding on red elder berries (*Sambucus canadensis*) and a little lower down one of ten to twenty gorging themselves on pinchberries. So it seems that when Bluebirds disappear from their haunts in July, they are simply congregating in places where wild fruit abounds.

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### FRANKLIN HIRAM KING\*

BY MRS. H. J. TAYLOR

Franklin Hiram King was born near Whitewater, Wisconsin, on June 8, 1848. He died at Madison, Wisconsin, on August 4, 1911.

The only school in which Professor King graduated was the State Normal School, now called Teachers' College, at Whitewater, in 1872. After his stay at Cornell University, mentioned below, he spent a summer at Beaufort, N. C., in the biological station then maintained by Johns Hopkins University. In 1910 the University of Wisconsin conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science.

From 1878 to 1888 King taught in the Normal School at River Falls, Wisconsin. In 1888 the University of Wisconsin called him to the Chair of Agricultural Physics, the first of its kind in America. He prepared his own textbook for this work. It was so successful that six editions were published. He remained in this connection until 1901. From 1901 to 1904 he held the position of Chief of the Division of Soil Management, in Washington, D. C.

King's contribution to economic ornithology consists of a paper entitled "Economic Relations of Wisconsin Birds", published in the "Geology of Wisconsin" (Survey of 1873-1879, Vol. I, Part II, pp. 441-610). King began working on this subject in 1873. In 1875 the State of Wisconsin invited him to make an official report on the economic importance of birds in relation to agriculture. He then realized the necessity of a thorough knowledge of insects. He began to

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\*Mrs. Taylor published a sketch of F. H. King as a part of another paper in the WILSON BULLETIN, XLIII, September, 1931, pp. 188-189. In the meantime additional material has been obtained, together with a portrait of Professor King. At the Editor's request Mrs. Taylor has re-written this sketch, incorporating both the old and new material.—EDITOR.