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The Kentucky Warbler

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BIRDS OF KENTUCKY

By Brasher Collins Bacon and Burt Leavelle Monroe

PREFACE

The actual and urgent need for a complete and reliable list of birds of Kentucky is apparent to the steadily increasing number of persons who are interested in the ornithology of this state. This need is due to the fact that among all of the publications on ornithology there is none that presents, at this time, a complete review of the available records of Kentucky birds.

In compiling this list, it has been the authors' intention to make it thoroughly reliable, and, with the kind assistance of others, as complete as possible. No species is entered except on good authority. Some that doubtless occur are omitted because of inadequate information or the absence of a specimen. Dates of occurrence, without which no list is complete, are given in each instance where possible. In the case of permanent residents no attempt has been made to include all records.

In this undertaking we have had the valuable assistance and counsel of Dr. Gordon Wilson, editor of *The Kentucky Warbler*, and Mr. Albert F. Ganier, curator of the Tennessee Ornithological Society and editor of *The Migrant*. To them acknowledgement of their cooperation is hereby given.

To the following we are indebted for notes, suggestions, and other assistance, all of which has made this list possible:

1. Dr. L. Otley Pindar, Nicholasville, published in *Auk*, October, 1889, **Birds of Fulton County, Kentucky**. This list was based on observations made between 1884 and 1889. It was revised by Dr. Pindar, with notes added during March, April, and part of May, 1890, and from March 1, 1892, to November 1, 1893. This revised edition was published in *The Wilson Bulletin*, June-September, 1925.

2. Dr. William Delbert Funkhouser, Lexington, edited **Wild Life in Kentucky**, which was published October 1, 1924, by the Kentucky Geological Survey.

3. Dr. Harrison Garman, Lexington, published in 1894 a preliminary list of **The Vertebrate Animals of Kentucky**.

4. Dr. Gordon Wilson, Bowling Green, has published three regional studies: **Birds of Bowling Green, Kentucky, Auk**, April 1922; **Birds Seen at the Mouth of the Ohio River, The Wilson Bulletin**, June, 1922; and **Birds of Calloway County, The Wilson Bulletin**, September, 1923. His **Bird Life of a Transient Lake in Kentucky, The Wilson Bulletin**, September, 1929, adds many new species for the Bowling Green area.

5. Mr. Albert F. Ganier, Nashville, Tennessee, has published numerous articles that concern Kentucky avifauna, the most important being **Water Birds of Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee**, which appeared in bulletin form in 1933, published by the Tennessee Ornithological Society. Mr. Gainer's **A Distributional List of the Birds of Tennessee** has proved very valuable, since a large number of species to be found in Tennessee have practically the same status in Kentucky.

6. Mr. Benedict J. Blincoe, Dayton, Ohio, formerly of Bardstown, has published two large lists: **The Raptores of Nelson County, Kentucky, The Wilson Bulletin**, March, 1920 and **Birds of Bardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky, Auk**, July, 1925. The latter list is a revision of an earlier one by Charles Wickliffe Beckham, with Mr. Blincoe's own observations through a long period of years.

Miscellaneous published notes and letters to the editors come from the following ardent students of Kentucky birds: Dr. T. Atchison Frazer, Marion; Mr. Floyd Carpenter, Louisville; Dr. L. Y. Lancaster, Bowling Green; Miss Mabel Slack, Louisville; Mr. Edward M. Ray, Fordsville; Messrs. James G. Suthard and James Hancock, Madisonville; Miss Emilie Yunker, Louisville. The following authors whose writings have furnished much information on the early bird life of Kentucky are often referred to: John James Audubon, Alexander Wilson, Constantine Rafinesque, and Charles Wickliffe Beckham.

We fully realize that this list may not be complete. For instance, notes and available records on the bird life of eastern Kentucky are very meager. Some of the eastern part of the state lies in the Transition Zone, and many of the nesting species in the mountains are therefore similar to those of southern Canada. Extensive knowledge of them is lacking at present. However, this list will serve, at least, as a foundation on which to build; and, if it meets with the approval of those for whose use it is intended, we shall feel amply repaid for our efforts.

For purposes of uniformity and condensation the information given in the list will make use of the following terms to indicate relative abundance: Abundant, Common, Fairly Common, Rare, Very Rare. Seasonal distribution will be indicated as follows: Permanent Resident: found during the entire year; Summer Resident: found during the breeding season only; Winter Resident: found during the winter months only; Transient: species that migrate through the state in the spring and fall; Visitor: occurring within short periods only and not of regular occurrence at any season.

The order of listing as well as the common and scientific names used

are taken from the 1931 edition of the **Check List of North American Birds**, issued by the American Ornithologists' Union.

INTRODUCTION

Bird students and enthusiasts in Kentucky are most fortunate in that the state enjoys an excellent geographical position for the study of birds. Lying mostly in the Upper Austral Zone but with portions on the Lower Austral and Transition Zones, the state affords three different faunal areas for study. Being situated on the main northward faunal migration route, Kentucky also has birds passing through it on their northward journey into Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and on into Canada. It is the branching point for birds traversing the Mississippi Valley that turn eastward and follow the Ohio Valley into Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. With this geographical position afforded, the Kentucky ornithologist has practically an unlimited field for study.

Kentucky, from the point of view of the established ornithologist, is indeed rich in bird lore, chiefly because of the fame of three noted ornithologists who for a time visited, lived, and studied in the state. Alexander Wilson made a trip in 1810 down the Ohio River to Louisville and then on foot or horseback to Lexington, Bowling Green, and on through the state toward Nashville. On this journey he observed several species not previously known to science. John James Audubon lived at Louisville and Henderson from 1808 until 1821 and did extensive work on the birds at Louisville and on or near the Falls of the Ohio River, as well as in the lower Green River country. Through the writings and travels of Constantine Rafinesque, who through a period of years was a professor at Transylvania University and contributed largely to Kentucky's early scientific development, we have gained considerable knowledge.

The passing years have witnessed the deforestation of much of our land, and many birds, numerous in the days of the famous trio of ornithologists, have gone. Many species, formerly common in Kentucky and frequently referred to by Wilson, Audubon, and Rafinesque, are now very rare or extinct, such as the Whistling Swan, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, the Whooping and Sandhill Cranes, the Wild Turkey, the Ruffed Grouse, the Prairie Chicken, the Carolina Paroquet, and the Passenger Pigeon. Where the last generation enjoyed myriads of birds, future generations may have to be content with the remnants of a once great host. This must be avoided, if possible.

A better knowledge of our wild life acquired through educational programs sponsored by the Kentucky Ornithological Society and similar organizations and the establishment of bird preserves and refuges have increased interest in our bird life to a great extent. It has brought to the people of Kentucky a realization of the true value of birds from economic and aesthetic standpoints.

There is an ever-increasing need for more lists and articles concerning our feathered inhabitants so that the rising enthusiasm may not be dimmed.

With the exception of a preliminary list as given by Garman in **The Vertebrate Animals of Kentucky** and Funkhouser in **The Wild Life of Ken-**

tucky, no complete resume of the birds of Kentucky has ever been attempted. Since the publication of these lists many local lists covering various areas of the state have appeared. To the knowledge of the authors the present list, beginning in this issue, and continued until it is finished, is the first dealing exclusively with Kentucky's avifauna.

(Continued in October Issue).

BIRDS OF A JEFFERSON COUNTY MARSH

By Burt L. Monroe

Rain, rain, and more rain! For day after day we had nothing but rain. Everybody was complaining about the weather, that is, nearly everybody, because there were some few of us who were glad indeed to see the only marsh near Louisville filling up with water. This pond ordinarily goes dry rather early in the summer, but this year we had visions of its remaining throughout the year.

During the early weeks of April waterfowl fairly covered the open water here. I might explain that this marsh is made up of a series of ponds separated by a road, a dike, a row of trees, and a private driveway. The first three ponds that you come to are full of cattails and marsh grass; the last two are expanses of open water bordered by mud flats. It is on the latter two ponds that the waterfowl congregate. Blue-winged Teal was the most common species noted here, closely followed in numbers by the Lesser Scaup, which moved in off the Ohio River, which is perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Shovellers were also noted in groups of ten or twelve. Baldpates and Gadwalls mingled with Ring-necks and a pair of Green-winged Teal. Several Red-breasted Mergansers visited the pond on several occasions. Coots were perhaps the most numerous of all. They appeared here this year in larger numbers than I can recall in recent years. Large rafts of them floated on the Ohio at this time. Pied-billed Grebes, a lone Horned Grebe, and two Florida Gallinules just about completed the swimming birds, with the exception of a pair of Buffleheads, which visited us on April 12.

Among the shorebirds noted there were the ever-present Killdeer, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary, Spotted, Pectoral, Least, and Semipalmated Sandpipers. On May 28 I saw what appeared to be the White-rumped Sandpiper, but identification was not positive.

Hérons were plentiful. The Black-crowned Night Herons came down from their rookery on Six Mile Island to feed in the marsh. Green Herons lined the shores, and an occasional Great Blue was flushed. The American Bittern was seen on four occasions, and the Least Bittern became quite common in May. The Sora Rail lurked among the tangled growths on the edges, but the King Rail, which has nested here for the two previous years, was conspicuously absent.

On May 20 the water receded enough for me to make my first venture into the swamp with my hip-boots. I found one nest of the Least Bittern built in a low bush just about a foot above the water line. It contained three fresh eggs. One nest of the Pied-billed Grebe, containing eight eggs, was found and another nest of the same species, empty. Red-winged Black-birds' nests were scattered profusely throughout the swamp, nineteen being counted on my first trip through. Most of these nests contained eggs, but few had young birds in them.

On May 25 I returned to the marsh and photographed the Least Bit-

tern nest, which now contained four eggs, and the Pied-billed Grebe nest. On May 30 during another investigation of the swamp, I located another Least Bitten nest with one egg and another Pied-billed Grebe nest with five eggs. It was on this day that I realized that there were numerous Least Bittern nests in this marsh where I had in previous years found only one in a season. A thorough investigation on June 2 revealed ten nests of the Least Bittern, three empty ones and seven with from one to six eggs in each. There were also numerous places where the Least Bittern had folded over the cattails to make roosting places. On this day I noticed that the nest of the Grebe containing the five eggs had never been covered, as is their custom. A week later, noticing the same condition and the fact that there were four eggs on the bottom and one on top, as they had been previously, I found that the eggs were addled and stuck to the bottom of the nest. In removing them, I found that the white covering came off, leaving a pale bluish and shiny undersurface in deep contrast to the usual creamy and rough shell. The other nest, with the eight eggs, was doing fine. Five eggs were hatched, and the very small black-and-white-striped Grebes were swimming about in the water, diving each time they saw me. One little fellow, sitting on the top of the nest covering, was unable to push his way into the water with his oversized and grotesque feet before I caught it, and I had the pleasure of examining a young Pied-billed Grebe at close range for the very first time in my life. Inclement weather forced me to pass up the opportunity for some photography of the young birds. All eight of these eggs eventually hatched, and I believe the brood is being raised with some marked degree of success.

Several excursions into the marsh on successive days revealed to me the startling total of seventeen Least Bittern nests. I wrote Mr. Albert F. Gainer, of Nashville, Tennessee, telling him of this discovery and explaining to him that I had been able to find only one nest here the year before. He is of the opinion that the heavy rainfall has assured the birds plenty of water until after the breeding season, at least. I believe that this is the correct solution for such a large Least Bittern colony springing up in this rather small expanse of marshland.

The abnormal rainfall raised the level of the ponds on June 21 to such an extent that it was impossible to continue studies for the time being. The next venture into the marsh was made on June 30, and in the meantime tragedy had stalked through the cattails. Frog hunters had promiscuously tramped through the dense growth of cattails and had upset all but two of the nests containing eggs. Not a young Least Bittern was in evidence. Minute searching disclosed two new nests, one containing five eggs and one four, bringing the grand total of the season to nineteen, but it is a conjecture as to whether these nests will meet the fate of the others. It is most unfortunate that just when a colony of Least Bitterns seemed to become established, they should meet with such a useless fate. To catch a frog in that place is practically impossible, but that means nothing to the average human being.

The search for the nest of the King Rail has so far proved futile. A nest, built on the end of a floating board, has been found, but its identity is unknown. The Florida Gallinule cannot be located, and the Coots are not about, but the search in the marsh goes on. It is like a game, when one never knows what comes next. The marsh holds a magic that is lost on dry land.

I anticipate something finer in the future. The ponds are full of tadpoles, crawfish, minnows, frogs, and other food. I look forward to a congregation of American Egrets and Little Blue Herons on their northward trip. I enjoy the marsh, and I at least tramped through it, just at dusk, when the last rattle of the Kingfisher died away and the Swallows were

coming in to roost among the cattails with the Red-wings. I shudder at the thought that the rumor still persists that the marsh is to be drained. I have witnessed the desecration of many good bird grounds, and I do not care for such sights. Do you wonder that it takes about twenty nesting attempts to raise a brood of Least Bitterns?

THE McELROY FARM—SEASON OF 1935

By Gordon Wilson

Like Burt Monroe, I fear I have not felt a sufficient sadness because of the extremely wet spring and summer, for I have had a highly successful season at the McElroy Farm, where I have studied birds on a transient lake for many years. This farm lies ten miles south of Bowling Green and contains a depression, drained by underground streams, which fills up in very wet weather, transforming a very fertile cornfield into a paradise of water and wading birds. Ordinarily the water is gone entirely by the first or middle of May, but as I write this, July 3, there are still more than 200 acres in the pond, which has receded several times to 100 acres or less but for only a few days. At its highest it has reached the 300-acre mark.

Since March 1, when I made my first trip to the area, I have made 33 trips, long and short, to the farm. For a time in March I thought the pond was about to disappear, but tremendous rains raised the level again, so that there is very little doubt but that the pond will remain in reduced form until fall. Thus far I have recorded 39 species of water and wading birds on this pond, only one of which, the Common Tern, was not seen in the regular spring migration. The water has been so high that I have been unable to wade out to the bank of the ravine except on June 19, when I found eight nests of the Coot, all deserted because of a rise over the eggs after they had been incubated three or four days. Two of the nests had six eggs each, the other two, none, or shells. I have seen young Green Herons on several occasions but have found no nests. I have searched in the woods and thickets around the lake for nests of ducks but have been wholly unsuccessful as yet. The rising and falling of the water level has probably prevented most of the nests from bringing forth a full complement of the young.

The 39 species are briefly listed, with the first and last date recorded and an occasional comment: Pied-billed Grebe, April 13-July 3, probably some of the water-soaked piles of weeds on the bank of the ravine are nests of this species; Double-crested Cormorant, one on May 8; Great Blue Heron, March 28-June 19; Little Blue Heron, one on May 24 and two on May 25; Eastern Green Heron, April 6-July 3; Black-crowned Night Heron, March 23-June 19; American Bittern, March 26-May 25; Common Mallard, March 1-April 16, as many as 400 in the earlier part of the season; Red-legged Black Duck, March 2-May 4, more plentiful than I have ever seen it before; Baldpate, two on March 23 and four on April 6; American Pintail, March 1-26, as many as 1500 in the early days of March; Blue-winged Teal, March 23-July 3, some eight pairs of the 250 or more remained over for the summer; Shoveller, March 15-June 19, at least one pair remained on into the summer; Ring-necked Duck, April 13-May 11; Lesser Scaup, March 4-June 22, two to eight recorded on through May and June after the more than 400 had disappeared; American Golden-eye, four on April 6 and twenty on April 13; Old Squaw, two certainly of this species and eighteen more apparently so on March 26; White-winged Scoter, two on March 26; King Rail, not found until June 11, but recorded regularly afterwards; Florida Gallinule, one on May 24; American Coot, March 15-July 3, more than 2000 in the middle of April and ten to twenty throughout the summer; Semipalmated Plover, April 26-May 25; Killdeer,

found on every trip but never very numerous; Golden Plover, one on April 24 and again on April 26; Ruddy Turnstone, one on May 29 in a flock of some hundred Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers; Wilson's Snipe, March 2-May 11, more than 100 on April 13; Spotted Sandpiper, April 24-May 29; Eastern Solitary Sandpiper, April 6-May 25; Western Willet, seven on May 1; Greater Yellowlegs, March 6-May 18; Lesser Yellowlegs, March 26-May 25, one appeared in the fall migration on July 3; Pictorial Sandpiper, April 6-May 11; Baird's Sandpiper, five on May 4, ten on May 11, and two on May 18; Least Sandpiper, May 4-29; Red-backed Sandpiper, two on May 25; Semipalmated Sandpiper, May 11-29; Herring Gull, one on March 28 one on April 24, and one on May 4; Common Tern, four on June 11 and five on July 3; Black Tern, one on May 4, three on May 25, one on June 19, and seven on June 22.

A GOOD SPRING LIST

On May 6, 1934, I took a spring census over the territory near the Ohio River and succeeded in listing ninety-one species of birds. For several years I had aspirations of listing one hundred in a day, but I soon realized that that was no easy task. My 1934 effort was the closest approach, and then I had more hopes. On Sunday, May 5, 1935 from 5 a. m. till late in the day, I listed the birds on the swamps near the Ohio River, the open fields near by, the dense-wooded hillsides, along the shore of the Ohio River, and into the Black Bridge country, the exact route followed in 1934. Despite the inclement weather I found ninety-six species! I was nearly home before I realized how near my hundred mark I had come. Here are the species found in 1935: Pied-billed Grebe, Eastern Green Heron, Black-crown-Night Heron, Blue-winged Teal, Turkey Vulture, Black Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Sparrow Hawk, Bobwhite, Coot, Sora Rail, Eastern Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Herring Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Bonaparte Gull, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Barred Owl, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Southern Downy Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Flicker, Kingbird, Crested Flycatcher, Phoebe, Bank Swallow, Tree Swallow, Rough-winged Swallow, Purple Martin, Blue Jay, Eastern Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Bewick's Wren, House Wren, Mockingbird, Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Wood Thrush, Veery, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Olive-backed Thrush, Eastern Robin, Bluebird, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Cedar Waxwing, Starling, English Sparrow, Red-eyed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, White-eyed Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Black and White Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Myrtle Warbler, Black Poll Warbler, Sycamore Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Palm Warbler, Louisiana Water-thrush, Kentucky Warbler, Maryland Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Cerulean Warbler, Cowbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Baltimore Oriole, Bronzed Grackle, Summer Tanager, Eastern Goldfinch, Lincoln Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, White-throated Spar-

row, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Red-eyed Towhee, Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting.

B. L. MONROE.

THE KENTUCKY ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Organized April, 1923

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Meets annually in Louisville during the week of the Kentucky Education Association; in the fall at some town or park in the state.

