

Fall 1938

Kentucky Warbler (Vol. 14, no. 4)

Kentucky Library Research Collections
Western Kentucky University, spcol@wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ky_warbler



Part of the [Ornithology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kentucky Library Research Collections, "Kentucky Warbler (Vol. 14, no. 4)" (1938). *Kentucky Warbler*. Paper 44.
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ky_warbler/44

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kentucky Warbler by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

. . . The . . .

Kentucky Warbler

*"To sift the
sparkling from the
dull and the true*

*from the false is
the aim of
every Ornithologist."*

Volume XIV

AUTUMN, 1938

No. 4

PICTURE THIEF IN THE HERON'S NEST

By ALLAN M. TROUT

(Reprinted through the courtesy of the Courier-Journal)

There are still happy hunting grounds in Kentucky, particularly if the huntsman uses a camera instead of a gun. The game is plentiful, the thrills are exhilarating, and the satisfaction of a successful hunt is ample compensation for the danger and patience involved.

The idea of shooting birds with a camera immediately suggests the Audubon country around Henderson, where the greatest naturalist of them all made his world-famous observations and drawings early in the last century.

And that is where the expedition hereafter described turned—to the Audubon Heronry twelve miles southwest of Henderson and two miles from the head of Diamond Island in the Ohio River. In hunting parlance, the field was baited. For it was nesting season for the Great Blue Heron, the Egret, and the Double-Crested Cormorant. The young birds were still in their nests, hungry, restless and noisy. The old birds were busy as beavers bringing in food; too busy to pay much attention to the cameraman and his crew of helpers.

And therein lay the secret of the expedition's success. The young birds couldn't fly away, and the old birds wouldn't leave their offspring.

H. Harold Davis, photographer for The Courier-Journal, went to the swamp's edge by automobile. With him were Capt. R. C. Soaper, agent for the Game Management Division of the U. S. Biological Survey; State Game Warden James V. Sellers; Leon Busby, lineman for Henderson's municipal power plant, and Bob Denton, a steeplejack.

The party paused long enough to put on hip boots. Then they shouldered their paraphernalia and started wading through brackish backwaters, choked with debris left by a late spring flood.

The heronry was about a half-mile inside the swamp, but it was heard long before it was seen. The clattering symphony of shrieking, fluttering birds in and around some 200 nests heightened interest in the party below and led unerringly to a small grove of majestic pecan, maple and gum trees.

Captain Soaper selected a fine pecan tree right in the center of the grove. It was on a tiny island in the slough of backwaters, was straight as a die and towered to about 125 feet. It was forty feet to the first limb. At the top were twenty nests, all higher than those in the surrounding trees. Hence, if Mr. Davis could get himself and his camera to the top of that tree, he could snap the birds there and look down into the nests all around him.

But getting him up there was the problem. Fortunately for the expedition, Lineman Busby and Steeplejack Denton solved it nicely.

Mr. Busby climbed to the first limb with his poleclimbing gear, although he more than once gave up hope because the pecan bark was too thin to give his spurs safe anchorage. But he made it, and soon had a block and tackle secured to the first limb. The gear was triple-threaded with 375 feet of strong rope and was fitted with a small hoisting seat.

The professional steeplejack quickly hoisted himself to the first crotch, then lowered the seat for Cameraman Davis. In no time at all the three of them were standing on the first limb, forty feet above ground.

The steeplejack then "cooned" up the tree another forty feet, there being a smaller trunk and several limbs to his advantage. He lifted the top end of the block and tackle and tied it around the strongest limb in reach, close to the trunk. That was called making a "second hitch," meaning that this gear was not long enough to have reached from that point to the ground.

The cameraman was soon in the little seat, being hoisted another forty feet. Mr. Busby, the lineman, then climbed several feet more, but stayed well under the cameraman and the steeplejack. The last two, then being well up in the bushy part of the tree, climbed higher by ten to fifteen feet.

The huntsman was now ready to begin shooting in his baited field. It had taken him more than an hour to get up there, but there he was up a pecan tree nearly 100 feet, with a pair of hip boots on his feet and nearly \$1,000 worth of cameras and equipment hanging from his neck.

And he stayed up there three hours, making picture after picture of young herons and cormorants in their big nests; the old birds wheeling in from the sloughs and river, gorged with fish to be regurgitated into the greedy mouths of their young. There were nests around him and below, but few above.

Getting down was as difficult as getting up and, too, required about an hour. Steeplejack Denton was the last to lower himself on the little seat. He had secured the block and tackle to the first limb with a slip knot so that when he reached the ground he could jerk the guide line and unslip the knot. The gear then would fall from its anchorage, there being no one left in the tree to untie it.

But he tugged and tugged at the little guide line, and still the slip knot wouldn't unslip. One of the larger ropes had fouled it.

With professional disdain of the danger involved, and against the advice of his associates, Denton climbed back up that rope hand over hand not knowing, perhaps, that those on the ground had steel-ed themselves to a tragic climax to the day's sport. The knot, you see, had been tied so a tiny jerk would unloosen it.

Safely down again, Denton was the first to speak.

"Boys," he said, "that's the first time in four years one of them knots hasn't worked right for me."

Nobody knows for how long or why herons have been nesting in this swampy place on the bank of the Ohio in Henderson County. An old man on the Indiana side has told Captain Soaper he knows they have been nesting every year there since 1882. Maybe Audubon encouraged the first few with some sort of protection, and they just kept on wheeling up from the Gulf Coast the last of February and the first of March. Who knows?

At that, the heronry has been receiving organized protection only two years, thanks to the interest of the Kentucky Ornithological Society. It was in 1936 that the owners of the area cut out the more valuable timber, but Captain Soaper and the society co-operated to acquire the grove of magnificent pecan trees and several inferior surrounding trees that had been favorite nesting places for the birds year after year.

Each tree is posted with a bright yellow sign, and woe to him who molests them or the birds they shelter. Conviction in the Federal Courts carries a fine of \$500 and six months in jail, and in the State courts \$100 fine and thirty days in jail.

There are only three other known heronries in this area, east of Reelfoot Lake. There is a small one on the Six-Mile Island, near Louisville; another one under the bluffs at Barlow in Ballard County, and another near Waldron, Ind. The heronry at Henderson marks virtually the exact center of the migratory waterfowl populations in Captain Soaper's district of the U. S. Biological Survey, composed of Kentucky, West Virginia, Southern Indiana, Southern Ohio and Southern Illinois. The one at Reelfoot Lake, of course, is one of the greatest inland refuges in the Middle West.

Indications are that the 200 nests at the Audubon Heronry do not fluctuate much in number from year to year. The number may seem small to the casual observer, but it is heartening to the conservationist. At the average hatch of three birds a nest a year, 33,600 grown birds have been added to a wontonly-ravished species within the memory of the old gentleman in Indiana who first noted the nesting place in 1882.

The egret, particularly, needs just the protection that the Audubon Heronry affords. At one time, it was near extinction because the long white plumes which the birds wear on their backs during the nesting season were sought as adornments for women's hats. The bird is so wild that it can't be bagged except during the nesting season. The price for a single egret shot during the nesting season (when the beautiful plumes are out) has been as high as \$10.

The wild egrets stayed in character while the cameraman perched in their pecan tree. None of the old birds flew closer than to make wide circles overhead, but the young ones in their nests were fair game for the Leica lens.

The great blue heron is the largest of the American herons. It is stately, dignified and interesting. The heron fishes without stirring from the shallow water in which it wades. It stands motionless, its long, slender neck doubled into a flattened S. As a fish approaches, it holds the rigid position until the quarry comes within striking

range. Then the curved neck straightens, the long, rapier-like bill shoots downward with a stroke quicker than the eye, and Mr. Fish disappears.

Or, the heron may be seen walking slowly through shallow water, carefully lifting each foot above the surface and sliding it into the water again so gently as to cause hardly a ripple.

The herons and cormorants are solitary birds in habits until the breeding season; then they show a remarkable gregarious instinct by forming colonies such as the one at Audubon Heronry. They fly in from the South in late winter, and return by late September. They arrive and depart in very small groups, showing the colonizing instincts only during nesting and care of the young. It is not unusual for egrets to join herons and cormorants in building nests in the same tree.

Being fish eaters, the herons and cormorants are inclined to gorge both themselves and their young. At the least excitement both young and old will disgorge partially digested fish, frogs and crawfish, causing a virtual torrent of putrid matter to fall from the tree-tops. A routine precaution is to wear old clothes and large straw hats when visiting a heronry.

Eels are a great favorite with the cormorant, both young and old. When first hatched, cormorants look like little animated, greasy rubber bags. In a few days they take on a coat of heavy down, then develop into magnificent birds with black feathers, coppery-gray wings with gray edges and two curly black crests on the head.

These migratory fowls are considered an asset around backwaters, sloughs or sluggish running water. They catch the "rough" fish, that is, slow or diseased fish, rather than game fish. They clean out fish that have been trapped inland by overflows, fish that otherwise would die as the sloughs dry up.

The birds are beautiful assets to areas where wildlife is preserved and protected, as in the Reelfoot Lake section. There are thousands of herons, miscalled "cranes" in that area, a source of never-ending delight to the visitors there. They are popular attractions at zoos, botanical gardens and resort lakes.

* * * * *

ANOTHER HERONRY FOUND IN KENTUCKY

While hunting the lowlands near Goose Pond which is located in the western part of Union County, Kentucky, Mr. Walter Westerfield, of Morganfield, Kentucky discovered July 4, 1938 a "heronry" in several large cypress trees which were growing in a swamp near the southern end of Goose Pond which is about 3½ miles northwest of Spring Grove, Kentucky.

Mr. Westerfield stated that there were 25 great blue herons, *Ardea herodias herodias*, about the nest when the site was discovered which was brought about by the noise which the birds were making.

The writer visited the heronry July 7 and found that there were 34 nests which were located in the tops of six cypress trees varying from 36 inches to 64 inches in diameter and towering about 125 feet into the air. Eight was the highest number of nests observed in a single tree. One nest had blown from a tree. On this visit twelve

great blue herons were counted in the trees about the nest. The young could fly so undoubtedly some birds had left the heronry. Seven dead herons were counted on the ground and one dead heron that had lodged in the top of a tree was mute evidence that the bird had been shot.

Most of the nests were in good condition and since there is a small number of nests one would conclude that this year is the first time that this species had nested in this site.

Further observations next year might indicate the permanency of the "heronry" but in the meantime efforts should be made to protect this heronry from the lumberman and gunner.

—RAYMOND J. FLEETWOOD, Madisonville,, Ky.

* * * * *

NEED FOR HERON PROTECTION

The two preceding articles clearly outline the pressing need for protection of the Heron Rookeries, several of which have recently sprung up in various parts of our state. In the Audubon Heronry, money was put up by individuals to purchase the trees containing the nests. It would be well if the Kentucky Ornithological Society and its friends set up a fund, aside from regular dues, to be used exclusively for this particular purpose. Any contributions along this line will be graciously received by the Society. Send contributions to the Secretary.

* * * * *

NOTES ON THE AUTUMN PLUMAGE OF WARBLERS

In the fall of the year, there are many species of warblers which in general are olive green above and yellowish below and are therefore very difficult to distinguish. To aid in their identification, the following points have been listed. They do not attempt to give a complete description of each of the species but give a general one and list some features which are diagnostic of the different species.

Most of the data was secured from "A Field Guide to the Birds," by Roger Tory Peterson, "The Warblers of North America," by Frank M. Chapman, "The Birds of Minnesota," by T. S. Roberts and "The Birds of Massachusetts" by E. H. Forbush. To these authors, I make special acknowledgement.

PART ONE—(All species under this heading have two white wing bars).

Magnolia Warbler—All ages and sexes. Brownish olive above and yellow below. A few faint streaks on the flanks. Rump yellow, tail black crossed midway by white band. Faint eye ring.

Pine Warbler—Larger than most warblers. Back unstreaked. Faint white marks on middle of outer tail feathers. (a) Adult male. Olive green above. Underparts canary yellow, brightest on throat. Dim streaks on breast. (b) Adult female; young. Dull olive above. Underparts whitish or dull yellow, faintly streaked with dusky on sides.

Black-Throated Green Warbler—Immature female only. Olive above yellow cheeks, throat and breast fading to white on crissum and sides, which are streaked.

- Black-Poll Warbler**—All birds in fall in varying degree. Above olive green, dingy yellow below. More or less streaked above and on sides. White under tail coverts. Some have faint yellow eye ring and yellow stripe over eye. Each individual wing feather shows rather distinctly due to yellow edging around darker center.
- Bay-Breasted Warbler**—All fall birds. Olive green above, dingy buffy yellow below. Some birds have bay color on sides. Yellow under tail coverts. Faint streaks on back and sides.
- PART TWO**—(No wing bars except in very few cases one may imagine one sees a faint yellowish bar).
- Tennessee Warbler**—All fall birds. Olive green above, yellowish below. Only Warbler with unstreaked yellow breast and yellow line over eye. Under tail coverts white.
- Orange-Crowned Warbler**—All fall birds in varying degree. Above olive green, below lighter olive green or dingy yellow, faintly streaked. Head may be gray and crown patch is usually hidden or lacking. Often has faint yellow eye ring and streak over eye.
- Nashville Warbler**—All fall birds. Back olive green, underparts yellow. Top of head grayish. White eye ring and yellow throat. Crown patch wanting or difficult to see. Legs dark.
- Connecticut Warbler**—Female and young male. Under tail coverts yellow and extend nearly to end of tail. Olive above, yellow below. Trace of gray or brown on head and dark stain as a band across the breast. Walks instead of hops. (This bird is to be found in Kentucky in the spring but as it migrates chiefly along the Atlantic seaboard in the fall, it is not apt to be encountered with here).
- Mourning Warbler**—Female adult and all young. Head and neck gray. Sometimes traces of white or yellow eye ring. Olive above, yellow below. Under tail coverts yellow and reach only one-half way to end of tail.
- Canada Warbler**—Immature. Gray or brownish upper parts, bright yellow under parts. May be trace of necklace on breast. No white on wings or tail.
- Bachman's Warbler**—Female. Olive upper parts. Under parts yellow fading to brownish white on lower belly and crissum. Top of head and auriculars blue gray. Forehead yellow.
- Hooded Warbler**—Female and young. Plain olive above. Forehead yellow, rest of head olive or grayish black. A little white in tail. Bill black.
- Wilson's Warbler**—Female and young. Either yellow all over except trace of black cap or plain olive green above and bright yellow below. No streaks, marks or wing bars of any kind. Eye black, round and beady. Bill not black. A rather small warbler.
- Maryland Yellow-Throat**—Female and young. Plain olive green except yellow throat and breast. No black mask. Belly whitish. Legs light color.

Yellow Warbler—Only small bird that is yellow all over. Male shows at close range, red streaks on breast. These are either very faint or lacking on female and young. Only species that has yellow spots on tail, i. e., these spots are merely of a more brilliant yellow than the balance of the tail.

Other warblers have more distinctive markings and are not included here for that reason. The ones included are simply the ones that make ornithologists go crazy in the fall.

—FLOYD S. CARPENTER, Louisville, Ky.

* * * * *

SWIFTS ROOSTING IN TREES NEAR LOUISVILLE

When the reader has read through the caption of this note, he may be a bit disappointed to find that the observations chronicled were not made during the Swift migration now in progress. Perhaps, however, the fact that they were made by so renowned a birdman as John James Audubon may compensate somewhat even though some one hundred and thirty years have elapsed. In his *Ornithological Biographies*, in the chapter on Chimney Swifts, Mr. Audubon writes as follows: "Immediately after my arrival in Louisville (in 1808) . . . the late Major Wm. Grogan, upon whom I had called, asked me if I had ever seen the trees in which Swifts were supposed to spend the winter but which they only entered for the purpose of roosting." Upon answering in the affirmative, Major Grogan described the location of such a tree near Louisville. "I found it to be a sycamore," writes Audubon, "nearly destitute of branches, about sixty feet high, seven or eight feet in diameter at the base and about five feet at the distance of forty feet up, at which place the hollowed stump of a broken limb, about two feet in diameter, made off from the trunk." The tree was found to be hard and firm, though a mere shell and hollow to the roots. On that July evening he watched the birds entering at dusk in great numbers.

"I did not pretend to count them for the number was too great, and the birds rushed to the entrance so thick as to baffle the attempt." Next morning he returned to the tree "before the least appearance of daylight" and heard sounds within. About twenty minutes later, however, he heard such a roar overhead that he thought the tree was coming down. He placed his ear to the trunk and listened to the roar within as the birds began to pour out of the hole above.

"It was very dusky, so that I could hardly see the hour by my watch, but I estimated the time which they took in getting out as more than thirty minutes." Desiring to see the birds within and their manner of roosting, Audubon had a hole cut in the tree near the ground, leveled a space within to stand upon, closed the aperture and left, to return several evenings later at nine. "All was perfectly silent" he writes, as he entered with a dark lantern and accompanied by a friend. They slowly raised the light and there "we saw Swifts clinging side by side, covering the whole surface of the excavation. In no instance did we see one above (upon the back of) another."

He calculated the area of the inner surface of the trunk and, assuming that each bird covered a space of three by one and a half inches, estimated there were about nine thousand birds inside. This estimate compares favorably with maximum actual counts in recent years by bird banders.

Audubon states that while Swifts were still roosting and nesting in hollow trees, that this had already become exceptional, so quickly

had the birds adopted the chimneys of those who had begun to settle that part of Kentucky less than three decades before. Might we not suppose that at least some of these "reformed" Swifts had followed the settlers down the Ohio and introduced the new custom to their backwoods kin?

—ALBERT F. GANIER, Nashville, Tenn.

* * * * *

NOTES FROM PICKETT STATE FOREST

So successful and enjoyable was the bird trip of the T. O. S. to Roan Mountain in 1936, that it was decided in 1937 to go to Pickett State Forest, an area of 11,500 acres. Situated in Pickett County, Tennessee, this wilderness lies on the north end of the Cumberland Plateau, and is bounded on the north by Wayne County, Kentucky. As the habitat on each side of the line is identical, the birds found may be considered Kentucky species. Not long ago, the best timber having been removed, the tract was given by the owners to the State of Tennessee.

An interesting letter and a map by Albert F. Ganier, then editor of "The Migrant," served to attract a party of fourteen. Present for the entire week were Alfred Clebsch, Sr. and Alfred Clebsch, Jr., of Clarksville, Tenn., Dr. Cynthia Counce and Howard Counce, of Memphis, Tenn., Dr. George Davis, Murfreesboro, Tenn., Albert F. Ganier, Nashville, Tenn., Mabel Slack, Robert Mengel and the writer from Louisville, Ky. Present part time were M. S. Carter, William Hay, Mary Lee, Dr. George R. Mayfield, and F. A. Pattie, Jr. The week was that of June 14-20, 1937.

There is more primitive country in this region than in any similar area. The Cumberland River, Rock Creek, Big Laurel, and the Wolf River cut deep gorges through the forest. The valleys are flanked by high sandstone escarpments. Chimney Rock, just across the line in Kentucky is one of the most spectacular monoliths east of the Rockies, rising more than 150 feet. This was visited by Mr. Ganier and three companions, who photographed it from the top of a nearby pine.

The plant life of the area is luxuriant. Hemlocks grow along the streams, while short leaf and scrub pines, as well as a few stately white pines are abundant. Most abundant, however, are the hardwoods, such as oaks, ash, dogwood, and others. Mountain laurel and white rhododendron are abundant, and were blooming profusely during our visit. Among the lovely ferns we found, especially at Hazard's Cave, were marginal shield, mountain spleenwort, climbing ferns, Christmas ferns, and others, to mention a few.

A careful census of the birds present was made, and several species of particular interest, as pertains to Kentucky, were found. Six Duck Hawks were noted on various occasions, and an eyrie was found about two miles from the state line. One bird was observed at the state line, and as the habitat is everywhere suitable, it seems probable that the Duck Hawk breeds in both Wayne County, Kentucky, and Pickett County, Tennessee. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker was seen on three occasions, once within less than a mile of the line. This bird being of roving habits, and a permanent resident, it too doubtless breeds, or at least occurs in Wayne County. Another interesting thing is the case of the Raven. They formerly nested in Rock Creek canyon, probably in each state, until driven away six or seven years ago by a logging railway. It is said that a pair of

Golden Eagles also nested in the same valley until a few years ago. These birds may possibly have been the last of their kind to breed in Kentucky. An unexpected find, by Robert Mengel, was the Black-crowned Night Heron. All told, 69 species of summer birds, representing the work of all members, were recorded. Especially indebted were we to Alfred Clebsch, Sr. for the composite list of birds seen by all observers. Several of the most interesting species follow:

Eastern Ruffed Grouse. Although none of our party recorded it, we were told by workers in the forest that it is fairly common.

Wild Turkey. Very rare but reported reliably as being occasionally shot.

Great Horned Owl. One heard near the state line. It should be common.

Southern Pileated Woodpecker. Rarer than expected as only four were seen.

Northern Pine Warbler. Common.

Northern Prairie Warbler. Voted the most abundant bird.

Hooded Warbler. Common.

Scarlet Tanager. Common on the ridges.

Bachman's Sparrow. Nine recorded singing.

A Chuck-will's Widow was heard on June 14, near Pall Mall, and a brood of newly fledged Prairie Horned Larks was seen four miles north of Byrdstown in Clinton County, Kentucky. For complete list see the graphic study of "Summer Birds of Pickett Forest," by Albert F. Ganier in "The Migrant" for June, 1937.

—EMILIE YUNKER, Louisville, Ky.

* * * * *

THE SEASON AT LOUISVILLE

Continued rains and high water kept the Falls submerged far past the usual time, forcing local observers elsewhere. Wood Ducks have been in greater evidence this year than previously, as many as twenty being seen at a time. Alder Flycatchers were present in Caperton's Swamp until July 30, when a specimen was finally collected from a family of this year's birds. Dickcissels were rather common during the summer, especially near Worthington. On July 21, the first migratory shorebird of the season, a Solitary Sandpiper, was seen. It was followed on the 23rd by Pectorals, two Least, and a Semipalmated Sandpiper. These were at the mud flat by the pumping station of the L. Water Co., and repeated on the 29th. Fifteen Upland Plovers on the Municipal Airport on the 30th gave us a pleasant surprise.

The Falls finally became accessible on Aug. 18, and were first visited on the 20th when Pectoral, Least, Spotted, and Semipalmated Sandpipers in moderate numbers; six L. Yellowlegs, and a dozen Semipalmated Plovers were listed. Semip. Sandpipers became numerous on the 24th, and a Black-bellied Plover arrived on the same date, remaining until the 26th. The 26th brought two Buff-breasted Sandpipers, seen by Mrs. Hobson and myself. One of the latter was collected on the next day by Monroe, making the second Falls and State record. Two Caspian Terns, a Piping Plover, two Baird's Sandpipers, and a Duck Hawk, arrived on the 27th. Messrs.

Goodpaster, Koch, and Maslowski were here on the 28th and succeeded in collecting the Piping Plover and the first Stilt Sandpiper of the year. Caspian Terns were again seen on Sept. 1, and the 2nd brought two (Long billed?) Dowitchers to the mud-flat mentioned above. Sanderlings were seen on Aug. 20, (3) and Sept. 3, (2). Two Stilt and a Baird's Sandpiper showed up at the flat on Sept. 5, the latter again on the 10th and 11th. Three White Pelicans, the first from the area, were reported on the Falls the morning of Sept. 5th. The report was verified the same afternoon by Miss Slack and Mrs. Hobson. Two Golden Plovers and a Buff-breasted Sandpiper were collected on the 11th, when Maslowski, Koch, and Goodpaster, with Mr. Ganier, again visited. The only Osprey of the summer was also seen.

Both Egrets and Terns have been very rare this year. Not more than a dozen Americans, one Little Blue, and no Snowies, completes the total; and Terns were even fewer. Only two G. Yellowlegs were seen during the summer—another unusual scarcity.

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were recorded on Sept. 10, 11, 18, 19, and 20, with the largest number at five. Warblers seen, mostly on the 18th and 19th, are as follows: Nashville, Tennessee, Redstart, Magnolia, Cape May, Black and White, Bay-breasted, Ovenbird, Black-poll, Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue, and Parula. The migration has been good, compared with the rather poor spring showing. Two Cliff Swallows at the Swamp on Sept. 19, were thirteen days later than our previous last date.

—ROBERT M. MENGEL, Louisville, Ky.

* * * * *

MOLOTHRUS ATER ATER alias COWBIRD PUBLIC BIRD ENEMY NO. 1

Known as the Cowbird, Cow Bunting or Cow Blackbird from its habit of alighting on the backs of cows or cattle, where it sits contentedly while they are grazing, this bird is a notorious bird enemy, a parasite. It does not build a nest but, like the European Cuckoo, lays its eggs in the nests of other birds, usually in those of species smaller than itself. Generally a single egg is deposited, but as many as five have been found in a nest. I found three eggs of this bird in the nest of a Kentucky Warbler in which there were only two eggs of the rightful owner. The exact number the female lays is not known as far as I can ascertain.

Just what birds have been parasitized by this intruder present a never-ending and increasing list. I have been able to collect information that eggs have been found in the nest's of the Blue-gray Gnat-catcher, Black and White Warbler, Parula Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Maryland Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, House Wren, Warbling Vireo, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Indigo Bunting, Song Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Goldfinch, Swamp Sparrow, Slate-colored Junco, Ovenbird, Wood Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Traill's Flycatcher, Dickcissel, English Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Bluebird, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole, Bullock's Oriole, Hooded Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Kingbird, Red-eyed Towhee, Prairie Horned Lark, Wilson's Thrush, Wood Thrush, Red-headed Woodpecker, Robin and Mourning Dove.

Of this list, I have found many of them parasitized by the Cowbird but on May 28th, 1938, I added another "host," to me the most unusual and interesting of all. During a motor boat trip up Harrod's

Creek in Jefferson County, Kentucky, I had occasion to inspect a veritable colony of nests of the Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*). Most of the nests, built in small holes in dead snags contained eggs. One nest, in a very small cavity, contained five eggs of the Warbler and one egg of the Cowbird. To all appearances, the entrance to the nest was entirely too small for a Cowbird to enter, yet the egg within was very heavily incubated along with those of the rightful owner. Unfortunately, the set could not be preserved. How the Cowbird was able to lay in this nest will always be a mystery to me.

The study of the Cowbird is a most interesting one and should be carried further as to its parasitic habit. Eggs of this bird are subject to great variation in their size and markings, and when found in the nests of such birds as the Cardinal, Towhee, Meadowlark and Brown Thrasher, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish which is which. Yet it should not be understood that the Cowbird's eggs look exactly like those of the species just mentioned, for they really have, on the whole, only a faint resemblance to them, and when a large series of either species is brought together and compared with those of the Cowbird, the difference is at once apparent.

It is a common sight to see a small Sparrow or Warbler feeding a young Cowbird almost twice its size. When you witness it, you can feel certain that one or more birds of the host species sacrificed all so that it might be here. It is most certainly a contemptible species—yet a hardy and interesting one.

—BURT L. MONROE, Louisville, Ky.

October, 1938.

* * * * *

FALL MEETING OF THE K. O. S.

The annual Fall Meeting of the ^{Monroe} Kentucky Ornithological Society will be held in Lexington, Ky., on ~~October 27, 28 and 29~~ ^{Oct. 28 & 29}, 1938. Mr. Victor K. Dodge, for many years a pioneer in bird work in Fayette County and a leader in the Lexington Audubon Society, will act as host and will assist in formulating a program for our entertainment. Large delegations are expected from Louisville, Lexington, Berea, Bowling Green, Madisonville and Henderson as well as many visitors from our contemporary cities of Nashville, Tenn., Indianapolis, Ind., and Cincinnati, Ohio. Field trips have been arranged to visit the many lakes and reservoirs in the vicinity of Lexington and as the meeting will be held at the height of the waterfowl migration, a great many birds may be studied.

General programs will be held on Friday and Saturday nights. The business session will be held on Saturday morning at 10 A. M., with field trips scheduled for Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. Make your plans now to be with us.

* * * * *

One of our most loyal members in the K. O. S. is Mr. W. Foster Hayes, of Harvey, Illinois. Always a booster for the Society, he never passes up an opportunity to create good will for us and to interest groups in forming a chapter. Recently, he has been doing some excellent work in Owensboro, Ky., and has lined up several enthusiastic members in that region. We will probably have a chapter there in the very near future.

Mr. Hayes, in addition to being on the alert for prospective members, is also always on the alert for birds. His keenness was rewarded immensely when, during the middle of September while visit-

THE KENTUCKY WARBLER

Publication of the Kentucky Ornithological Society

Issued for the Seasons

Subscription Price.....\$1.00 Per Year
(Includes membership to state organization and local chapters)

ing at Old Mission, about seventeen miles north of Traverse City, Michigan, he saw perhaps the rarest bird he has ever seen. In his own words, he states, "On the twenty-second instant, I had the good fortune to find an Artic Three-toed Woodpecker, which, as Strickland Gillilan said about the Purple Cow, I had never seen and never hoped to see. The Book of Birds of America says that on account of the rarity of this bird a sight of one is always an event in bird observation. I think there is not the slightest doubt as to the identity as, with a companion, I had a good view of it for perhaps a quarter of an hour. It was in the tops of several dead trees during that time."

* * * * *

WE GO A'FIELD

"Nature is the true idealist," wrote Emerson. "When she serves us best, she speaks to the imagination; we feel that the huge heaven and earth are but a web drawn around us; that the light, skies and mountains are but the painted changes of the soul."

Nature is more than a screen on which we project ourselves. The calm peace of a country landscape, the challenging inspiration of a colossal tree, the mysterious beauty of a waterfall affect us much more than a city scene. When tired, ill, or even happy, human beings turn to Nature as readily as a child to its mother.

The late Dr. Frank Crane once said, "A good dose of the outdoors would cure almost anything. Go out doors and get rid of nerves. Religion, faith, hope, love and courage inhabit the woods and meadows. Where but outdoors can you learn biology, geology, ornithology, astronomy and the like? Real science lives outdoors as much as leapfrog."

Thousands realize the logic of this statement, but business activities, professional pursuits, civic and home duties prevent them from following such advice. Yet more and more people are getting out in the woods and fields.

Nature, too, is the source of all knowledge. The pages of her great good, scattered over the continents and seas, have written upon them wonderful secrets; they are filled with tragedies and comedies; they are crowded with curious facts and fascinating tales.

The purpose of all nature articles is to collect some of these scattered pages, and present them to you in a manner as entertaining as possible. We like to present them to you in these pages of this bulletin so that your enjoyment of the outdoors and its denizens may become greater and so that your knowledge of the things around you may become more profound. To sift the sparkling from the dull and to sift the true from the false is our aim.