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## Kentucky Warbler (Vol. 54, no. 2)

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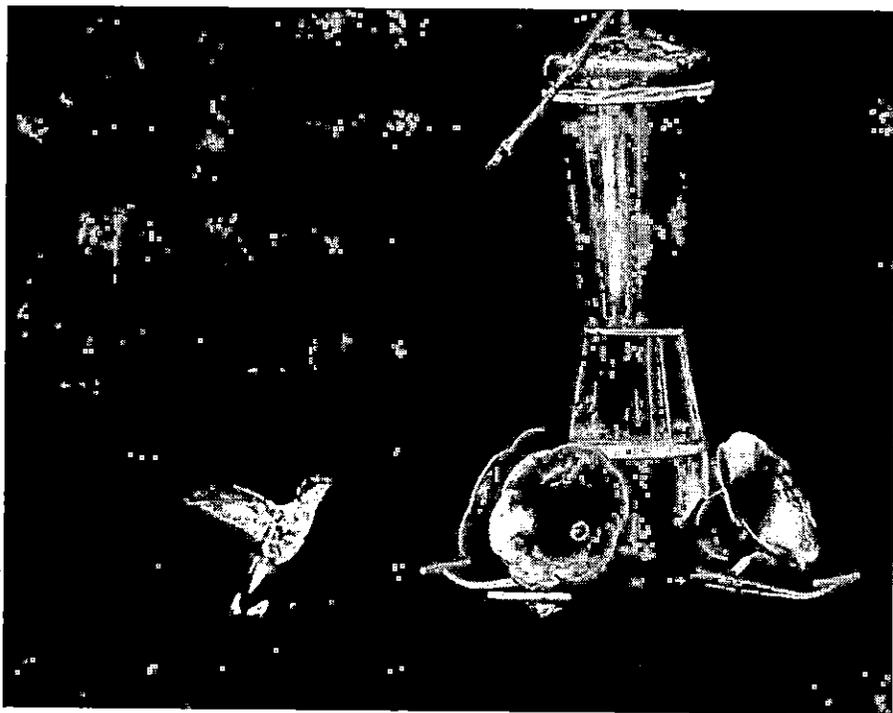
# The Kentucky Warbler

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## THE KENTUCKY WARBLER

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### OUR COVER

The photograph of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird at a feeder in Warren County was taken by Malcolm Guy Briggs in July, 1977.

## ANALYSIS OF KENTUCKY'S BREEDING BIRDS: DECLINING SPECIES

BURT L. MONROE, JR.

The summer breeding bird surveys, coordinated by the Migratory Bird and Habitat Research Laboratory of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have now been conducted in Kentucky for twelve consecutive years. The data gathered are becoming more important with each passing year and are gaining in significance with regard to the monitoring of avian population changes. After nine years of data, I reported (Monroe, *Ky Warbler*, 51:39-45, 1975) results for most of Kentucky's breeding species. The additional three years have produced both some startling changes and a few reversals in former trends. I have also refined some of the data to increase the reliability, thus also the significance of the figures. Techniques for taking the counts have not changed and have been mentioned in an earlier article (Monroe, *Ky. Warbler*, 46:43-45, 1970).

In viewing the data, I was initially surprised to find the greatest percentage of overall change in Kentucky breeding populations to be between 1966 and 1967, when compared to any two other adjacent years; in addition, most of the changes were indicated as increases in population density. It is apparent from other data that birds did not significantly increase between these two years within the state and thus the data from the surveys must be the product of some artifact. The artifact is clearly observer experience. Since 1966 was the first year in Kentucky, all observers were inexperienced in the count techniques and thus counts were on the low side. In subsequent years, only a very few new observers were utilized each year. In order to remove this artificial bias, I have chosen to omit 1966 from further analysis, leaving eleven summers of continuous data (1967-1977).

Of greatest concern to ornithologists and conservationists today are the avian species that are known to be declining; it is with this group that the present article is concerned.

Population declines apparent since 1967 fall into three general categories: (1) generally steady declines with a minimum of fluctuation between adjacent years, resulting in changes noticeable primarily on a long-term basis; (2) declines resulting from dramatic decreases only in the last one or two years, with earlier population changes variable, sometimes with actual increases preceding the precipitous decline; (3) noticeable declines over the period but with considerable fluctuation annually. It is difficult to treat the latter category, since one cannot be certain that the decline is real or that 1977 is a "down" year in the fluctuation pattern; species of this kind will be mentioned but not analyzed in detail.

Declines that are mathematically significant and thus almost certainly real population changes fall into categories (1) and (2) above. Category (2) contains those species that have suffered declines due to the severe weather changes in the last two years, especially that of 1976-77; population declines here may well be temporary with recovery in the future likely under better climatic conditions. Those species in category (1) are of greatest concern and probably represent real, perhaps permanent declines. The present article will deal with ten species that fall into categories (1) and (2), with data presented both in tabular form (Table 1) and graph form (Figures 1-3).

Species that have shown declines from 1967 to 1977 but are classed

in category (3) because of large annual fluctuations are as follows [mean numbers of individuals recorded on Kentucky counts in 1967 and 1977, respectively, given in parenthesis following name]: Ruby-throated Hummingbird, *Archilochus colubris* (0.76-0.41); Pileated Woodpecker, *Dryocopus pileatus* (1.24-0.63); Horned Lark, *Eremophila alpestris* (2.61-0.81); Rough-winged Swallow, *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis* (1.24-0.81); Loggerhead Shrike, *Lanius ludovicianus* (1.37-0.63); American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla* (1.47-0.06); and Dickcissel, *Spiza americana* (9.34-1.41). The American Redstart and Dickcissel apparent declines are the result of 1967 being a peak year for reports, with 1968 through 1977 not showing significant decreases; for the Dickcissel, 1967 was a population explosion year that has not subsequently occurred. The high Redstart count may be an artifact produced by a single count route that was changed the following year because of access problems. Horned Lark numbers also fluctuate greatly because by the count time in June, family groups are generally found; missing a single group may cause great fluctuation in numbers, thus inflating annual changes. Of the preceding species, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Loggerhead Shrike have shown declines nationally and may represent real decreases in Kentucky populations, but the state data are too variable to show significance statistically.

A few other species have shown declines during the period, but these are too small to be significant when annual variation is considered; all have decreased less than 30% during the eleven-year span. These species are: Red-bellied Woodpeckers, *Melanerpes carolinus* (8.82-6.72); Downy Woodpecker, *Picoides pubescens* (4.21-3.53); Eastern Phoebe, *Sayornis phoebe* (3.47-2.53); Brown-headed Cowbird, *Molothrus ater* (17.45-14.41); Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra* (3.74-3.13); and American Goldfinch, *Carduelis tristis* (10.63-7.69). All other species of breeding birds in Kentucky, as reported on the summer counts, with the exception of the ten yet to be discussed in detail, have either remained stable over the period or have increased in density.

The ten species with significant declines have decreased between 1967 and 1977 by at least a third (>34%) and over some shorter interval during the period by at least 40%. Furthermore, annual fluctuations are either relatively small or of insufficient magnitude to offset precipitous declines; in both cases, 1977 populations have decreased significantly and are deemed to represent real density changes.

The Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) is the most abundant breeding bird to show a significant decrease over the period; it also displays an unusual population curve (Fig. 1). The overall decline from 1967 to 1977 represents a decrease of 35.5% (for actual figures annually on this and following species, see Table 1), but an increase in the early part of the decade resulted in a peak in 1970; numbers declined rather steadily thereafter, with the greatest drop in the past two years, probably influenced by the severity of the winter climate. The drop from 1970 to 1977 represents a loss of 47.8%, while the decrease since 1975 has been 37.0%, a highly significant decline for a two-year period.

Back in the late 1960's, the Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) was sufficiently common to have it rank in the top ten species in abundance on Kentucky's summer counts. Presently it is one of three sparrow species on the declining list, with an overall decrease of 46.0% from 1967 to 1977 (Fig. 1). The greatest single year's decline was last year, with a drop of 23%; it is very likely that the severe winter was once again responsible for increasing the loss.

Although relatively stable over the early part of the period, populations of the Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) have declined at virtually a steady but slow rate since 1970 (Fig. 1). The resultant decline since 1967 amounts to 34.9%, with a loss of almost half (49.7%) between 1970 and 1977. It appears, however, that the severe winter of 1976-77 did not influence this species significantly, as the decline has continued at roughly the same rate throughout the 1970's. None of the three aforementioned species, depicted on Fig. 1, seems to be in any kind of difficulty populationwise and recovery from these declines should be expected in the next few years, especially if the winters improve, as all are resident in the state.

The Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) is a summer resident only and a species that had ranked in the top fifteen in abundance on Kentucky's summer counts. It has declined significantly over the decade, and especially since 1970, the peak year (Fig. 2). The overall decrease amounts to 38.4%, the loss since 1970 to 43.0%. There does not seem to be any correlation with climate (wintering in tropical America) or with habitat destruction; much suitable habitat is presently unoccupied within the state. It is possible that losses are tied in with pesticide pollution or with a decrease in insect food; so far as I am aware, no one has checked to see if reproductive success has declined. In any event, this is one bird that will bear close watching in the future.

The Tufted Titmouse (*Parus bicolor*) should perhaps not be among these ten species; it barely meets the required criteria, inasmuch as annual population fluctuations are marginally great for the overall noted decline. Nevertheless, since the decline is statistically significant, it is included for completeness. Since 1967 it has declined 52.3%, but only 37% since 1968 with rather large fluctuations annually both up and down. A resident species, it appears to be unaffected by the winter of 1976-77, as one might expect of so hardy a bird. I suspect future fluctuations will show a recovery and overall stability to be established in the 10-15 birds per count range.

Annual fluctuations in Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) populations have been much less than in the preceding species; thus the overall decline takes on more significance. A summer resident only, it has not been affected by the severe winter weather. Overall decline since 1967 has been 41.4% (Fig. 2). Reasons for the decline are obscure but may be similar to those of the Field Sparrow, less the winter situation. The species will bear watching in the future.

One of the mysteries of modern avian populations has been the drastic decline in the Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), a situation that is nationwide in scope. Its decline has been steady and inexorable, in Kentucky as well as elsewhere (Fig. 2). Reasons are unknown, but two major factors have usually been cited: pesticide usage (either through loss of reproductive capacity directly or through loss of insect food in agricultural systems) and agricultural practices (mowing of breeding areas while nesting is in progress). In any event, it is quite evident everywhere that the species is way down and that suitable ecosystems lack these birds. The decline since 1967 now amounts to a loss of 77.7%. If a decrease in reproductive potential is the primary cause, then this species is approaching the extant condition (headed for possible extinction with low population levels). Of all Kentucky species, this one is probably in more trouble than any other.

The Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) has been another species whose populations have been carefully watched in recent years. From about 1967 to 1975, Kentucky populations fluctuated somewhat annually but without

a significant change overall during the period. Drops in 1976 and again in 1977 have been precipitous, undoubtedly due in part to the severe winter weather (at least in 1976-77). Overall decreases have resulted in a loss of 67.7%; from the peak in 1972, the decline has been 69.0% (Fig. 3). Since 1975, populations fell 63.3%, so that virtually all of the significant change has occurred in this two-year period. In the past, bluebird populations have suffered from severe weather, and it is anticipated that the species will recover once milder winters reoccur. It will be interesting to see if there will be any recovery in the summer of 1978, in view of two severe winters in succession. In any event, populations will continue to warrant careful monitoring.

Perhaps the most dramatic decline of all, and one clearly evident to any field ornithologist during the past year, has been that of the Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*). After January 1977, winter populations in the midwest went virtually to zero. Summer 1977 brought but a trickle of birds into ecosystems formerly with large populations; in fact, until 1975, the Carolina Wren was one of the dramatically increasing species. There is no doubt that the severe winter did them in. A look at their evolutionary history reveals this weakness. The genus *Thryothorus*, one of the largest in the wrens, is entirely tropical except for the Carolina Wren. The species is an opportunist that has expanded its range northward during periods of relatively mild winters but is unable to withstand rigorous conditions that most birds tolerate (and that most other wrens withstand, having evolved in temperate climates rather than tropical ones). Despite the loss from 1976 to 1977 (90.4%), the most startling of all (Fig. 3), populations in the warmer southeast did not suffer and Kentucky's birds will undoubtedly recover at some future time if winters moderate again. With the severe winter of 1977-78, however, we will probably not see such a recovery in the summer of 1978. Nevertheless, the species overall is in no danger and populations will fluctuate in the future, upwards in milder conditions, down again with severe winters.

With overall densities as low as those recorded for the Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), it is usually difficult to obtain significant data as small fluctuations annually may obscure the picture. However, the decline has been so steady in this species that the figures take on much significance. Overall loss from 1967 to 1977 amounts to 75.0%. Other information also indicates that the species is decreasing through range contraction, perhaps in response to a corresponding increase in breeding populations and range of the House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*). The species is still widespread in North America, particularly in the western states, and declines are significant presently only for eastern populations.

One other matter pertaining to declining species should be mentioned at this point. In my 1975 paper (p. 51), I mentioned that five species, mostly forest inhabitants, had shown declining trends through 1974. It is interesting to note that all five have shown population recoveries, at least to a level for which the overall change is not significant. These species are: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, *Poliophtila caerulea* (2.84-2.66); Yellow-throated Vireo, *Vireo flavifrons* (1.13-0.88); Red-eyed Vireo, *Vireo olivaceus* (5.84-6.06); Warbling Vireo, *Vireo gilvus* (1.82-1.44); and Kentucky Warbler, *Oporornis formosus* (2.05-1.78).

Kentucky breeding species on the increase will be the subject of another article.

Table I. Mean number of individuals recorded per Kentucky route, 1967-1977, for ten declining species.

| SPECIES                                     | 1967  | 1968  | 1969  | 1970  | 1971  | 1972  | 1973  | 1974  | 1975  | 1976  | 1977  |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Tufted Titmouse .....                       | 15.84 | 12.05 | 12.45 | 13.81 | 13.97 | 10.56 | 11.92 | 10.52 | 10.48 | 8.91  | 7.56  |
| Bewick's Wren .....                         | 1.24  | 1.44  | 1.32  | 1.35  | 1.15  | 1.32  | 1.11  | 0.69  | 0.81  | 0.36  | 0.31  |
| Carolina Wren .....                         | 7.21  | 8.68  | 10.53 | 6.90  | 6.39  | 10.68 | 12.28 | 14.86 | 14.58 | 15.27 | 1.47  |
| Mockingbird .....                           | 18.95 | 18.05 | 20.92 | 24.52 | 22.03 | 19.53 | 19.78 | 18.79 | 16.58 | 14.97 | 12.34 |
| Eastern Bluebird .....                      | 14.21 | 13.27 | 11.92 | 12.19 | 13.27 | 14.82 | 12.44 | 12.28 | 12.52 | 8.94  | 4.59  |
| Yellow-breasted Chat .....                  | 20.66 | 21.00 | 20.26 | 22.32 | 18.55 | 18.18 | 16.00 | 16.48 | 16.16 | 14.85 | 12.72 |
| Eastern Meadowlark .....                    | 65.55 | 63.95 | 60.76 | 73.16 | 80.97 | 75.59 | 69.14 | 65.21 | 67.00 | 57.73 | 42.25 |
| Grasshopper Sparrow .....                   | 9.55  | 9.06  | 7.03  | 7.48  | 6.61  | 4.48  | 4.30  | 2.79  | 3.27  | 2.31  | 2.13  |
| Chipping Sparrow .....                      | 12.05 | 9.98  | 9.34  | 9.94  | 9.12  | 10.29 | 8.61  | 8.45  | 8.13  | 7.18  | 7.06  |
| Field Sparrow .....                         | 39.03 | 33.15 | 29.37 | 33.10 | 34.76 | 35.88 | 33.72 | 29.07 | 30.29 | 27.24 | 21.06 |
| Sample size (Number<br>of Kentucky counts). | 38    | 41    | 38    | 31    | 33    | 34    | 36    | 29    | 31    | 33    | 32    |

[Data from Migratory Bird and Habitat Research Laboratory, U.S. Fish &amp; Wildlife Service.]

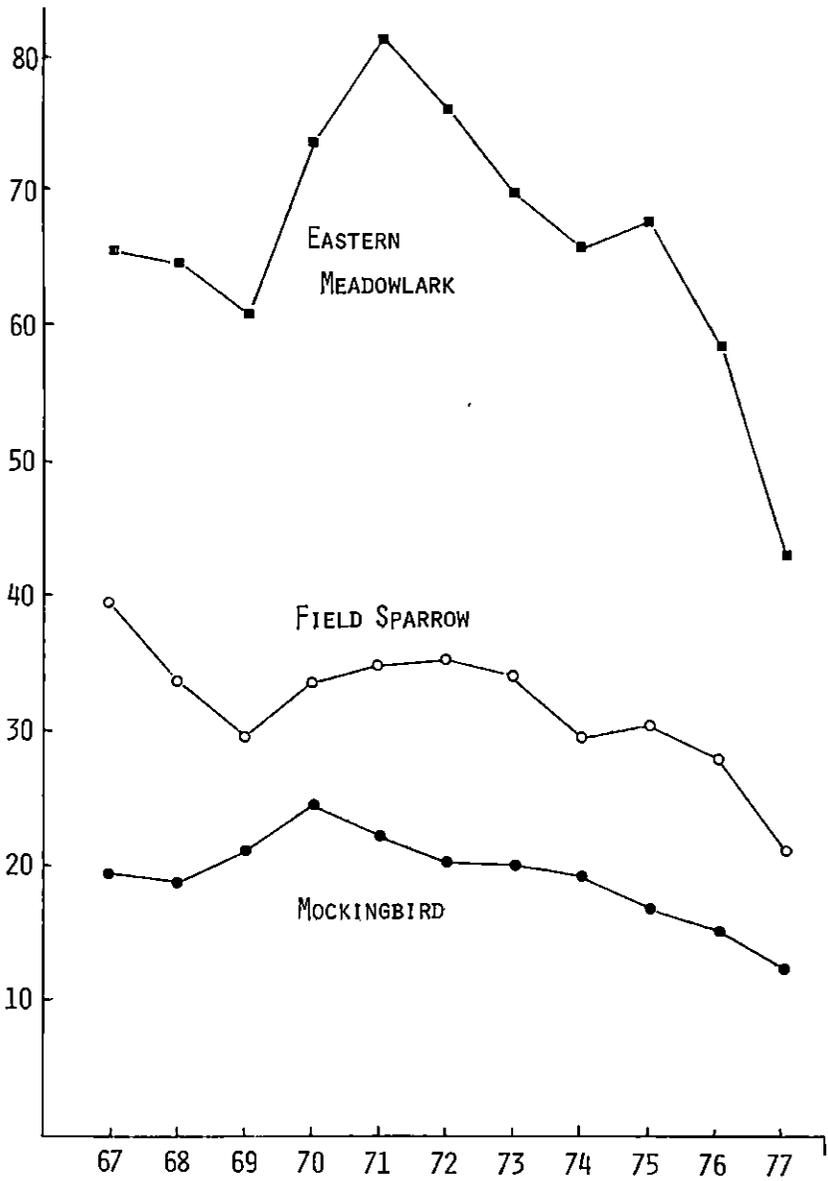


Figure 1. Mean number of individuals per Kentucky count, 1967-1977, for the Eastern Meadowlark, Field Sparrow and Mockingbird.

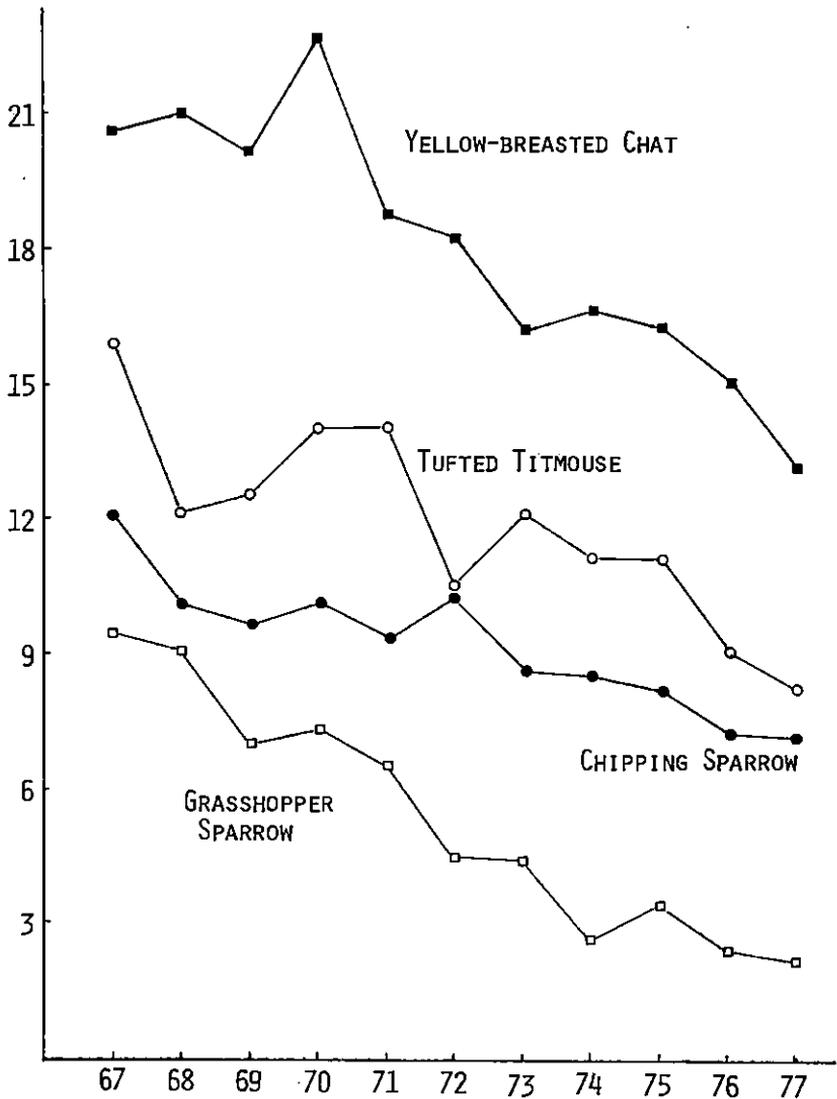


Figure 2. Mean number of individuals per Kentucky count, 1967-1977, for the Yellow-breasted Chat, Tufted Titmouse, Chipping Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow.

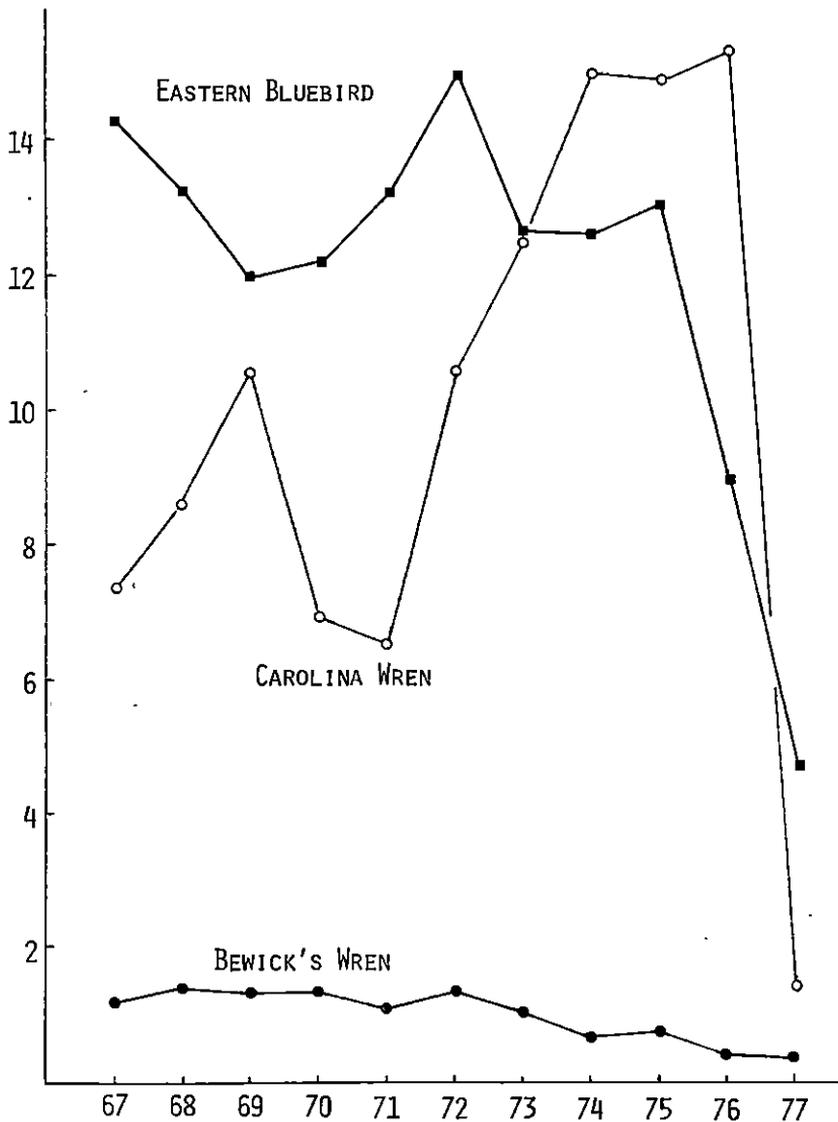


Figure 3. Mean number of individuals per Kentucky count, 1967-1977, for the Eastern Bluebird, Carolina Wren and Bewick's Wren.

## THE WINTER SEASON OF 1977-1978

ANNE L. STAMM

The winter of 1977-78 will long be remembered as one of the coldest on record for at least some parts of Kentucky. Subnormal temperatures were recorded in December, January and February. The average temperature in January was 22.9; normal for the month is 33.3 degrees. Also, the average daily temperature for February was 23.8, and according to the Weather Bureau, that broke the old record, set in 1895, by 2.8 degrees. In addition to the low temperatures the ground was covered with snow for long periods of time. In fact, in the Louisville area and perhaps for most of the state the ground remained snow-covered for 49 consecutive days from January 9 to February 27! The snowfall on January 16 was heaviest along the Ohio River from Louisville to Paducah, where snow measured up to 18 inches; the rest of the state had up to 7 and 10 inches. In Louisville it was the coldest winter since record-keeping began 106 years ago! The severe weather brought northern finches in great numbers, and it was not unusual to see flocks of Pine Siskins and an occasional Redpoll at feeding stations. Some species such as Bobwhite, Killdeer, Flickers, Meadowlarks and other ground-feeding birds may have suffered great losses, but this will not be known until the breeding season. Nevertheless, it is needless to say that the weather had its effect on the birdlife in the state, and below are the highlights of the observations recorded by K. O. S. members and state Fish and Wildlife biologists.

*Loons to Ibis.* — An interesting find was a single Red-throated Loon at the Falls of the Ohio on December 1 (LR & BM). Few observers mentioned the Great Blue Heron; however, numbers were up across Kentucky during the latter part of December as compared to the same period in 1976; most birds disappeared after the deep snows came in January; possible migrants had returned to Cynthiana and Lexington on March 1 and 3, respectively (RM). A Wood Stork, certainly off its course, was found sitting in a tree in Masterstation Park, near Lexington on February 15 by Mike Williams and was later photographed by Robert Morris. A subsequent visit revealed the bird was dead. The specimen was turned over to the Kentucky Fish & Wildlife Service in Frankfort (RM). At this time, no further details are available as to whether the bird died of starvation or some other cause.

*Geese - Ducks* — A peak of 130,000 Canada Geese was reached in February during the height of the cold weather at Ballard Waterfowl Management Area (JM); 100 were present during January and February at Dix River Dam, north of Burgin (FL). Eleven small Canada Geese were carefully watched on a reservoir in Lexington, December 11; although the subspecies was not determined, the difference in size was readily apparent when compared to two larger birds swimming nearby (BH). The peak number of Snow Geese during January totaled 15,000 at the Ballard Waterfowl Management Area (JM); one (white phase) was present during most of the period at Dix River Dam (FL). Few observers commented on the duck population, although it is possible that the inclement weather prevented birders from checking lakes, rivers, etc. The peak population

of ducks (all species, mainly Mallards and Blacks) in January at Ballard Waterfowl Management Area was 45,000 (JM). As of January 9, in the Land Between the Lakes area, there were "lots of Mallards and more Blacks than in several years" (JTE). A single White-winged Scoter fed with Lesser Scaup on Shippingport Island, December 10 and 18 (ALS and m. o. b.).

*Vultures, Hawks, Eagles and Falcons.* — Kentucky's largest concentration of Turkey and Black Vultures . . . 98 and 78 respectively, were found at Mammoth Cave National Park during the latter part of December (HES); 13 Black at Otter Creek, Meade County, January 13 (LaS); and three Black in Shelby County, February 21 (ALS, FWS). A few Goshawks were reported and documented: singles in Shelby County, near Grafenburg, December 6, 26, and in Oldham County, January 2 (WB). The heavy snow cover brought hawks to feeding stations in residential areas: a Sharp-shinned Hawk fed on a Pine Siskin in the Frank Heck's yard, Danville (fide FL); another "darted" for an American Woodcock, near LBL in late February (JTE); a Cooper's Hawk fed on a blackbird (sp?) in a Prospect yard (FK); another attempted to "extract a Starling from a trap in a Bowling Green yard" (HES). Several other Cooper's Hawks were observed in the Louisville area (BPB & ALS). There were conflicting reports concerning the Red-tailed Hawk: the species was considered "definitely down from most winters" in the Danville area (FL); eight were in the vicinity of a roost in Bowling Green, December 16 (HES); 20 to 25 on I-64 from Louisville to Frankfort in late December (BPB). At Murray, it was thought that raptor population was increasing (JTE), and at Bowling Green it was not unusual to see 10 hawks along a 10-mile stretch of highway in Warren County (HES). Red-shouldered Hawks were mentioned only a few times: four on January 6 from Murray to Reelfoot Lake (JTE); single birds on various occasions throughout the period on Pine Mountain (SM); one at Otter Creek Park, January 14 (LaS); however, the species appeared on nine Christmas Bird Counts. Few reports were received for the Rough-legged Hawk and it was thought to be "less numerous than last winter" in the Danville area (FL); fair numbers . . . 9-15 . . . throughout the period, northwest of Lexington (RM); and a single bird in eastern Jefferson County on numerous occasions after December 12 (m.o.b.). Golden Eagles were sighted on February 11: one adult and one immature at Land Between the Lakes (CP); 10 (unclassified) at Ballard Waterfowl Management Area (JM). Eighty-one Bald Eagles were counted in Kentucky on the One-Day Count, February 11 (K. O. S. members and guests). Although Ospreys are usually south of Kentucky during the winter months, singles were observed in Meade County along the Ohio River, January 14 (LaS) and on February 11 (WE & EN). A Merlin was present in Lyon County, February 25 (WB). American Kestrel were reported as doing well in the Murray area (JTE); fourteen were sighted along the highway in a 20-mile stretch from Louisville to Shelbyville on February 21 (ALS, FWS).

*Galliformes to Shorebirds.* — Despite the severe winter the Bobwhite fared well in western Kentucky (JTE); five to eight fed daily on cracked corn for a period of three to four weeks (January to mid-February) beside a house in a residential area of Louisville (HC). Killdeer were probably hard hit because of icy conditions and knee-deep snow cover as very few were observed since January, in the Louisville area (ALS). American

Woodcocks were late in arriving: eight on February 25 and six on the 26th on the snow-free ridges near Kentucky Lake were thought to be migrating (JTE); none were present in the Louisville area at the end of the period (BPB). The Common Snipes seemed to disappear in January and February in the Louisville area, and were "impossible to find at their usual haunts" in the Danville area (FL).

*Gulls.* — High Water at the Falls of the Ohio covered the rock ledge and many gulls moved out, but returned when the water receded. A few notable sightings occurred at the Falls: a single Glaucous Gull on January 14 was unusual (BPB); two Iceland Gulls were present February 23 (BM, BPB), also on February 24 (BM, ALS, LR, BPB), and February 26 to March 4 (m. o. b.). One hundred to 200 Herring Gulls remained at the Falls for part of January and February (BPB), and a probable Thayer's Gull on February 23 (BM, BPB).

*Doves, Owls and Woodpeckers.* — Mourning Doves were common at feeding stations in residential areas during January and February, and it was not uncommon to see 30 or more in one small yard in the Louisville area. Some birds were making their mournful calls as early as February 5. Short-eared Owls were fairly well distributed: four to eight during December and January at Masterstation Park, Lexington, and one as late as February 3 (RM); four at Carlisle in December (VK, WK); one to two east of Shelbyville on January 11-15 and one January 22, near Shelby and Oldham County line (WB); one in eastern Jefferson County, December 11 (Las). Red-headed Woodpeckers were considered more numerous than usual in western Kentucky (JTE, CP).

*Flycatchers-Nuthatches.* — No reports of Phoebes received since the CBC reports. Blue Jays were unusually common at Otter Creek Park, and flocks of 35 to 50 were observed on December 21 (ALS, JK). Horned Larks undoubtedly had a difficult time finding food; yet, few comments were received: 100 to 250 fed on a baited area of cracked corn and hay on Surrey Hill farm, Louisville, Jefferson County, throughout January and February (BPB); some 75 or more fed along the roadside where the ground was free of snow, Oldham County, February 24, while 175 fed in the valley of a nearby cornfield (ALS, FWS). A most unusual sighting was that of a Barn Swallow on December 27-January 2, at East Hideman Sewage Treatment Plant, Lexington (DC, RM, BM). Red-breasted Nuthatches were more widely distributed than last winter, but with fewer numbers; singles were reported at feeders in the Fern Creek and Louisville areas.

*Wrens, Mimids and Thrashers.* — A few Winter Wrens were reported in western Kentucky prior to January 9 (JTE), and the species disappeared after January 1 at Surrey Hill farm (BPB). Carolina Wrens have been down drastically since the severe winter of January 1977, and judging by the few reports, the species may be hurt even more because of the ice and deep snow of January and February 1978. The species is "virtually absent" in the Danville area (FL). A Gray Catbird was observed from December until January 13 in Louisville (BPB). Several Brown Thrashers wintered: several in the Kentucky Lake area (JTE); one at Louisville until March 7 (BPB). American Robins appeared in great numbers after the 15-inch snow in late January: an estimated 1,000 at Prospect (FK); scores fed along the edge of Little Goose Creek, where spots were free of snow (AIS). Most holly trees were stripped and food was at a minimum. Few observers

mentioned the Eastern Bluebird, yet numbers were down in December from the past three years.

. *Kinglets, Pipits, Shrikes and Warblers.* — Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets were down throughout the state: none at Surrey Hill after January 1 (BPB). A few Water Pipits were observed feeding with Horned Larks and Snow Buntings in a cornfield, February 24, Oldham County, where some bare ground was visible (ALS, FWS). The Loggerhead Shrike was thought to be "steadily increasing" at Danville (FL). Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers appeared to be absent in western Kentucky in December: first bird of the winter season at Murray, February 26 (JTE); few birds anywhere after the heavy snowfall. A Palm Warbler at Danville on January 6 was of special interest (FL).

*Blackbirds and Fringilids.* — During December and January an European Tree Sparrow was seen at a feeding station of Damon and Bernice Caddell in Lone Oak, near Paducah; it was photographed by David Berry (DB, BC). Rusty Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and a few Red-winged Blackbirds came to our feeding station from early January through most of the period (ALS). Two sightings of a single Brewer's Blackbird at Lexington were of special interest: one December 17 and one January 1 (DC). The large roosts at Mundfordville and Russellville each contained 1,000,000 birds (primarily Starlings, Common Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds) in December, but declined sharply during the cold weather of January. This was true of a roost at Bowling Green, too (HES). "The total numbers of roost species in the area were much lower than in the past five years" (HES). Evening Grosbeaks were numerous and widespread. The birds arrived early in the fall and then apparently moved farther south, but a new invasion occurred the first week of December; they remained throughout the period (m. o. b.). Purple Finches were numerous throughout the state. A new species appeared this winter — the House Finch; 25 to 30 fed daily at feeders during February at Richmond, Madison County (JH, AW); one in Louisville, February 12 (ALS, FWS, HK). One previous record of a single bird February 16, 1977, was made at Sandy Hook by William Greene (notes). A few Common Redpolls visited feeders at various places: one at Danville, February 4 (Frank Heck yard fide FL); one at Valley Station, January 29 (DS); another at Louisville, January 29 (ALS, FWS); one at Surrey Hill farm, Louisville, January 28 (BPB). Other Louisville records were confirmed and sighted by nonbirders. Pine Siskins were widespread and numbers were noticeable during January and February when 15 to 50 and up to 100 were observed at feeding stations. Small numbers of White-winged Crossbills covered a fairly wide area: 25 at Lexington on December 6, numbers dwindled in January, but 12 were present February 22 (DC, RM); eight at Cave Hill Cemetery, Louisville, January 2 (LaS, JP); a single bird at Surrey Hill farm, Louisville, January 28 (BPB); one at Jackson, January 10 (PA). No one commented on the Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco, but in the Louisville area, the species was down in December 59% from December 1976. Tree Sparrows came to feeding stations during January and February at the following places: Murray (JTE); Louisville, northeast Jefferson County (ALS); Audubon Park area, Louisville, with a peak of 17 birds, February 13 (JE); and at Jackson (PA). A few Lapland Longspurs showed up in the Louisville area: a few birds on January 22 (LaS); small numbers but up to 25 on January 14 and for much of the

period on a baited field (BPB). Snow Buntings appeared in larger numbers than ever recorded in the Louisville area: eastern Jefferson County, 200 birds, December 12 (GC); 15 along River Road, December 18 (CR); and 35 birds, February 24 in Oldham County (ALS, FWS); and one bird, near Guist Lake, January 31 (WB).

*Contributors.* — (PA) Pierre Allaire; (DB) David Berry; (WB) William Brown; Bernice Caddell; Katherine Clay; (DC) Dennis Coskren; (HC) Helen Covert; (GC) George Crabtree; (WE) Walter Ellison; (JE) Jackie Elmore; (JTE) Joe Tom Erwin; (JH) Jane Householder; (BH) Barry Howard; Ramon Iles; (HK) Helen Keener; (VK) Virginia Kingsolver; (WK) Wendell Kingsolver; (FK) Frank Krull; (JK) John Krull; (FL) Frederick Loetscher; (SM) Steve McKee; Mr. & Mrs. W. B. Mathes; (BM) Betty Maxson; (BM) Burt Monroe, Jr.; (RM) Robert Morris; (JM) James Moynahan; (EN) Eric Neff; (BPB) Brainard Palmer-Ball; (CP) Clell Peterson; (LR) Lene Rauth; (CR) Mrs. Charles Robertson; (HES) Herbert E. Shadowen; (LaS) Lawrence Smith; (FWS) Frederick W. Stamm; (ALS) Anne L. Stamm; Russell Starr; (DS) Donald Summerfield; (AW) A. Whitt, Jr. Other abbreviations — (CBC) Christmas Bird Count; (m. o. b.) many observers. — 9101 Spokane Way, Louisville 40222.

## THE KENTUCKY ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPRING MEETING

April 21, 22, 23, 1978

The fifty-fifth Annual Spring Meeting of the Kentucky Ornithological Society was held on April 21, 22, 23, 1978 at Mammoth Cave National Park.

At the general session held in the Lounge of the Lodge at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 21, Dr. Andrew Uterhart, President, welcomed the members and outlined the Saturday and Sunday field trips before turning the meeting over to Mr. Ramon Iles, Vice-president.

The schedule for the field trips and their leaders was:

7:45 to Sunset Point led by Howard Jones

8:45 — a less strenuous walk around the hotel, the campgrounds and vicinity led by Prof. A. Whitt and Mr. Bert Powell.

The members were left free for the afternoon to take their own trips such as that to Houchen's Ferry site where redstarts are sure to be found or to the warbler territory at Green River Ferry or the members could join Mr. Howard Jones at 1:45 for a trip to Cedar Sink. The Sunday trip at 8:30 a.m. led by Howard Jones would take the "bird watchers" to Cedar Sink.

Mr. Iles introduced Mr. Stickley of the Research Station of the Fish and Wildlife Service at Bowling Green who reported on the progress made on the blackbird problem he spoke on at the Fall meeting. The report showed a notable decrease in the number of blackbirds in roosts, as for example, the reduction from 20.3 million last year to 5.5 million this year in the Bowling Green area. The snow cover and the prolonged cold temperatures were undoubtedly important factors in the decrease in numbers.

Besides spraying, dispersal methods had been tried but with minimal

success, the roost dispersing for only a short distance because of immediate suitable surroundings. Mr. Stickley stated that Kentucky is giving up spraying operations to concentrate on reducing the Starlings at feed lots, the Starlings being the chief agricultural problem in the blackbird studies.

The laboratory study and research on Histoplasmosis by the University of Louisville and the Kentucky State Mycology Center continues, as also the study of TGE disease of young pigs, both associated with the blackbird problem.

Mr. Don Summerfield lamented the ingratitude of the Evening Grosbeaks at his feeding stations, who, after being fed all winter with expensive sisal seeds and grains, were repaying him negatively by snapping off bushels of 2-8 inch twigs from his hemlocks! A short discussion of "WHY?" came up with suggestions but no conclusions.

A film entitled "*A Great White Bird*" explained the wide-spread research into the mysterious life and habits of the graceful Whooping Crane and the various methods being employed by the Fish and Wildlife Services of the United States and Canada on reservations in Texas, Louisiana and in Buffalo Park in Canada to save this endangered beautiful bird from extinction.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

The cloudy cold, frosty Friday was transformed into an unbelievably inviting warm sunny Saturday morning. Even the birds trilled to the glorious day for in spite of the lack of water- and shore-birds, a total of 101 species was observed by the various groups through the day.

At the evening general meeting following the dinner, Vice-president Ramon Iles first showed a Texas Ornithological Society's film, "*What Good Is a Warbler?*" centered on the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler found only in certain areas in Texas where the bark of the Ash Juniper is readily available for nesting material and the abundance of Live-oak caterpillars assures food for the young. The encroachment of housing projects and highways is destroying the only available nesting areas. The short film stressed the correlation of the warbler to the environment.

Mr. Iles then introduced the main speaker of the evening, Mr. Frank Abrams, president of the Owensboro Chapter of the K.O.S. and a noted nature photographer of that area. Mr. Abrams first explained the structure of the various types of cameras, lenses and photographic aids he had brought, demonstrated the function of each and followed with the showing of superb photographs of birds and wildlife and flowers he had taken on a recent trip to Florida.

Dr. Andrew Uterhart then called on Mrs. Ann Stamm who relayed a message from Dr. Burt Monroe, who could not be present, concerning the June Breeding Bird Survey of which he is the Coordinator. Dr. Monroe asked for possible leaders to volunteer for several areas including McCreary, Martin, Pike, and Carter Counties in the east and Union, Hopkins and Muhlenberg Counties in the west.

Mrs. Stamm thanked those who participated in the one-day Bald Eagle Count on February 11, stating that a record of 81 eagles were sighted that day. She urged members to obtain Nest Record Cards, keep the data required faithfully and return the cards.

The minutes of the Fall meeting were not read as these are published in *The Kentucky Warbler*. The Treasurer's report given by Mrs. Jean Jones was accepted as read.

Dr. Uterhart announced that the 1979 Spring Meeting would again be held at Mammoth Cave National Park on April 27, 28, and 29 and that this year's Fall Meeting will be held September 29, 30 and October 1, 1978 at Danville. Reservations for rooms should be made directly to the Danville Holiday Inn by September 1.

Mrs. Kingsolver, Prof. Whitt and Mr. Ed Wilson were appointed as members of the Nominating Committee which is to submit a list of candidates for next year's officers at the Fall Meeting.

Dr. H. Shadowen reported on the Midwinter Bird Count, introducing a new member, Steve McKee, who conducted a count in the Black Mountain area. Dr. Shadowen commented on the uselessness of the almost limitless, widespread areas covered by individuals and/or groups in the Spring Count. He suggested that the areas be restricted as to size as they are for the Midwinter counts and that a limit be placed on the time.

Dr. Shadowen explained the general make-up of the K.O.S. publication, namely *The Kentucky Warbler*, explained the variations in the number of pages in the four issues per year and said he welcomes more articles by members and any suggestions or criticisms of the publication.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sister Casimir Czurlas  
Recording Secretary

### ATTENDANCE AT THE SPRING MEETING, 1978

- BLEDSOE: Mark Dalton, S. M. McKee  
 BOWLING GREEN: Dr. and Mrs. Charles Guthrie, Dr. and Mrs. H. E. Shadowen, Allen Stickley  
 CADIZ: Mr. and Mrs. C. Wesley Kemper  
 CARLISLE: Dr. and Mrs. Wendel Kingsolver, Anne Kingsolver  
 DANVILLE: Mr. and Mrs. Frank H. Heck  
 FRANKFORT: Doug Henley, Greg Henley, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Jones  
 JACKSON: Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Allaire, Tom Smith  
 JEFFERSONTOWN: Mr. and Mrs. William B. Mathes  
 LEXINGTON: Mr. and Mrs. Alfred M. Reece, Jr., Dr. and Mrs. Andrew Uterhart, Mr. and Mrs. James Williams  
 LOUISVILLE: Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Colburn, Bess Douthitt, Katherine Fulkerson, Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur F. Jackson, Evelyn Schneider, Lawrence Smith, Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Stamm, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred G. Susie  
 MADISONVILLE: Thelma Gentry, Mr. and Mrs. N. M. Travis  
 MURRAY: Dr. and Mrs. Hunter Hancock, Shirley Galimore, John Kurtz, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Parker, Mr. and Mrs. Larry Sanders  
 NICHOLASVILLE: Betty Maxson  
 OWENSBORO: Frank Abrams, Sister Casimir Czurlas, Mary L. Greenwell, Mr. and Mrs. Ramon R. Iles, Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Powell, Wynema Sims, Mr. and Mrs. L. E. Wilson

PADUCAH: Mr. and Mrs. Damon Caddell

RICHMOND: Mr. and Mrs. Pete Thompson, Marcia Trodahl, Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Whitt

SPRINGFIELD: Dr. J. R. Barber

VALLEY STATION: Walter J. Ellison, Mr. and Mrs. Donald P. Summerfield

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE: Mary Eads

### BIRDS OBSERVED AT THE SPRING MEETING, 1978

Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Wood Duck, Turkey Vulture, Black Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, American Kestrel, Turkey, American Woodcock, Solitary Sandpiper, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Chuck-will's-widow, Whip-poor-will, Chimney Swift, Belted Kingfisher, Common Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Wood Pewee, Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Purple Martin, Blue Jay, Common Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Wood Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Eastern Bluebird, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwing, Loggerhead Shrike, Starling, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Solitary Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Golden-winger Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Black-burnian Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, American Redstart, House Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, Orchard Oriole, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Scarlet Tanager, Summer Tanager, Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, Rufous-sided Towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow.

### FIELD NOTES

#### AN AMERICAN WOODCOCK ON THE RIVER CITY MALL

On November 23, 1977, Betty Nichols noticed a rather strange-looking bird, crouched on the street on the River City Mall in Louisville; it could not fly. She noted its long bill and 'big round eyes.' Miss Nichols, a lover of animals, realized the bird was in possible danger, with scores of people walking in and out of buildings on Fourth Street. Therefore, she picked

it up and took it home. She placed the bird in a cage and fed the stranger canned baby food (meat and vegetables), with a medicine dropper. In a few days, the bird became active, and Miss Nichols called to ask my advice since she was interested in its survival. Her description convinced me that the bird in question was a shorebird. I suggested feeding mealy worms and possibly ground beef and releasing the bird in a wet boggy area. She brought the bird to me on November 28 and it was an American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*). No injury or damage from a gun shot wound could be found. However, most of the feathers on the crown were missing. The bird was placed on the moist ground, near a spring at the base of a wooded slope in my neighbors' yard. Immediately there was a whizzing sound and the woodcock was in the air, flying to an adjacent wooded hillside. This sudden flight was not expected. However, since a cold front moved into the area on November 22, the woodcock during its migratory route southward very likely hit one of the downtown buildings, and was temporarily stunned. — ANNE L. STAMM, 9101 Spokane Way, Louisville, 40222.

#### WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL — FIRST CUMBERLAND PLATEAU SIGHTING

On January 10, 1978, Smith was walking through downtown Jackson, Kentucky (Breathitt County) when a small bird flew across the street in front of him and lighted in a Hemlock tree (*Tsuga canadensis*). Since the bird appeared unusual in flight and behavior he decided to investigate further. A closer look revealed that the bird was an immature White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*). Clearly visible were the white wing-bars, crossed mandibles, red wash on the head and back, with the underside heavily streaked. Subsequently, that afternoon Smith returned with Allaire and observed the bird with binoculars feeding on cones in the same hemlock tree.

This sighting constitutes the first record for this species on the Cumberland Plateau. Mengel (*The Birds of Kentucky*, 1965) states that the bird is a casual winter visitant and has sight records from the Louisville area only. Monroe (*Kentucky Warbler*, 45:47-56, 1969) lists White-wings as very rare from late November to early March and occurring only in the central part of Kentucky from Land Between the Lakes east to the Cumberland Plateau. Morris (*Kentucky Warbler*, 40:39, 1970) observed this species in Lexington while a more recent record occurred at Bernheim Forest in December 1975 (*American Birds*, 2:385, 1976) during the annual Christmas Bird Count.

Cold northerly winds a few days before, followed by 6-10 cm of snow, probably "pushed" some of the northern finches southward into Kentucky. Should this be true then other records are sure to follow regarding this species and others often associated with this genre. — TOM SMITH, 980 Highland Avenue, Jackson, Kentucky 41339 and PIERRE N. ALLAIRE, Department of Science and Mathematics, Lees Junior College, Jackson, Kentucky 41339.

#### HOUSE FINCHES IN MADISON COUNTY

The recent heavy snows throughout the state have brought a colorful variety of birds to backyard feeders, not the least of which is the chattering Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*). Almost everyone is familiar with

the red raspberry color of the male Purple Finch and the sharply marked female. On January 18, 1978, while watching a group of female finches on our feeder, I was surprised to note that some of them were much browner looking over the head and lacked the broad white eye line of the female Purple Finch. Only then did I look at the male finches more critically, and here we had, side by side on a platform feeder, a perfect setting for comparison — the red raspberry of the Purple Finch and the more true-red or orange-red of the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*). There were ten or 12 pairs of each species in the area.

I had seen the House Finch in Colorado but had never heard it mentioned in Kentucky nor seen it listed on Kentucky's midwinter bird counts. Both the male and female House Finch have a more streamlined appearance than the Purple Finch. And the male House Finch, along with his true-red color, has his sides streaked with brown and a brown wash over his crown. I was satisfied, excited, and gratified when my identification was confirmed by both my husband and Mr. A. L. Whitt. To my knowledge this is the first recorded sighting of the House Finch in Madison County. — JANE HOUSEHOLDER, 121 Westwood, Richmond 40475.

*Editor's Note:* Dr. William C. Greene, Jr. reported the sighting on February 16, 1977 of a male House Finch at a feeding station near Sandy Hook in Elliott County, which is apparently the first sighting of this species in Kentucky.

#### DEPREDAATION OF HEMLOCKS BY WINTERING EVENING GROSBEAKS AND PINE SISKINS

Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) have been visiting my feeding stations with regularity since the winter of 1969-70, and Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*) have been more erratic visitors since the winter of 1968-69. The sunflower and small seed feeding stations hang from the branches of two 40 to 50 foot Hemlocks (*Tsuga canadensis*) which grow close together with their branches intertwined.

Since the spring of 1973, grosbeaks have been observed grasping the ends of small branches in their bills and snapping them off sharply. Occasionally one of the birds would take the remaining stub and bite on it briefly. On other occasions the grosbeaks were observed pressing the truncated ends of the branches with their bills.

The observation was a surprise to me since before noting the grosbeaks in this activity, I had gathered bushel baskets of twigs varying in length from 2 to 8 inches and destroyed them because I first thought the shedding of the twigs was caused by girdling insects (*Oncideres cingulatus*). Forbush (1929 *Birds of Massachusetts*, Vol. III, page 5) makes mention of the fact that Evening Grosbeaks had been observed to snap off small twigs of maple trees and drink the flowing sap.

In the winter of 1977-78 the Pine Siskins were observed to be plucking individual Hemlock needles from the trees throughout the season.

It is estimated that during the winter of 1977-78 the two Hemlocks lost approximately 25 per cent of their foliage by the joint depredation of the Evening Grosbeaks and the Pine Siskins. The Evening Grosbeaks numbered 30 to 40, and the Pine Siskins numbered 40 to 50 at maximum count around February 1, 1978. — DONALD SUMMERFIELD, 9910 Prairie Drive, Valley Station 40172.