

A BIRDING HISTORY OF DUTCH MOUNTAIN, PENNSYLVANIA

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North Mountain originates in eastern Sullivan County just west of Ricketts Glen State Park and extends northeast into Wyoming County covering an area of approximately 250 square miles. The average altitude is about 2000 feet, placing it physiographically on the Allegheny high plateau.

Dutch Mountain covers about one-third of North Mountain. Named for the early German settlers, including some of my maternal forbearers, it is a historical rather than an exact geographical area. The Dutch Mountain road which transverses the area intersects with Pennsylvania Route 487 some seven or eight miles north of Ricketts Glen State Park and one mile south of the borough of Lopez.

The mature primeval forests of the mountain and the rest of northern Pennsylvania were lumbered in the late nineteenth century and have been replaced by northern hardwoods, namely Sugar and Red maple, American Beech and Black Cherry. There are still isolated islands of Eastern Hemlock and White Pine. Both Mehoopany Creek and the Loyalsock have their headwaters on the mountain, the former flowing east to its confluence with the north branch of the Susquehanna River, and the latter west to the west branch of the same river.

Little has changed on the mountain in the past one hundred years. There are no major ski resorts and the land developers have not arrived. Much of the area is still privately owned or is State Game Lands. Studies of the breeding birds of the mountain began as early as 1891. One Jonathan Dwight Jr. spent seven days in northern Pennsylvania in June 1891, including three days on North Mountain. Based on this short visit, Dwight published an article, "Summer Birds of the Crest of the Pennsylvania Alleghenies" which appeared in the *Auk* in 1892. This article includes an annotated checklist of the birds he observed.

The following paragraph from Dwight's article waxes poetic in his description of North Mountain.

On North Mountain the forest is truly primeval; the Hemlock, the Yellow Birch, and the Maple are the characteristic trees and attain great size. The Hemlocks are scattered in considerable numbers through the forest and tower above it, their huge trunks often four or five feet in diameter marking them out as giants among their lesser

brethren. The underbrush is often dense and everywhere great logs, covered with green moss lie moldering. Here and there you hear clear cold brooks that seem to imitate the song of the Winter Wren that is almost constantly heard along them. The drawling song of the Black-throated Blue Warbler is heard on every hand. High up in the Hemlocks the drowsy sounds of the Black-throated Green Warbler is heard, and the lively chatter of the Blackburnian Warbler catch the ear. Is not this a bit of northern Maine? You can easily imagine yourself there, although several familiar birds of that region are here missing. There are no White-throated Sparrows or Myrtle Warblers, so truly Canadian. Here it was that for the first time I heard the Wood Thrush, the Hermit, and the Olive-backed all singing at the same time. The three species were abundant and the music at sundown was a concert which for sweetness would be hard to excel.

His statement concerning the Myrtle Warblers and White-throated Sparrows is interesting. Both are now common breeders and it is probable that at least the White-throat was there at that time.

Just after the Civil War one Frederick August Behr purchased five hundred acres on the mountain and cleared the land for farming. Frederick was married to my maternal great-grandfather's sister. The couple had seven children, including two sons, Otto and Herman. As young men, the two sons purchased an additional thirteen hundred acres adjacent to the original property and started a lumbering and milling business.

Otto and Herman were excellent amateur naturalists. In May 1897, they wrote to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia advising they had collected a Goshawk nest with eggs and offered the nest for the Academy's collection. This was the first Goshawk nesting record for Pennsylvania. The letter also stated that if there were any question of their credibility to contact Dr. B.H. Warren, a well-established ornithologist of the day. Apparently their credibility was accepted, for in September 1897, Otto and Herman were elected corresponding members of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club.

In June 1898, Witmer Stone first visited the mountain and met the brothers. A close friendship developed and Stone became a frequent visitor in the ensuing years. After a second visit in June 1899, Stone published an article, "The Summer Birds of the Higher Parts of Sullivan and Wyoming Counties, Pa." The article included a listing of the birds observed during his two visits, and appeared in *Abstract of the Proceedings of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club*, 1900.

The first paragraph of his article is significant.

The boreal element in the avifauna of Pennsylvania has been steadily decreasing for a number of years past as the primitive Hemlock and Spruce forest disappears before the advance of the lumberman. Several lists of birds of those parts of the state which possess a more or less typical Canadian fauna of any part of eastern Pennsylvania that I have visited, and a list of the birds will, therefore, prove of interest. This is especially the case since I have at my disposal the observations of Messrs. Otto and Herman Behr of Lopez, Pa., two excellent ornithologists who have spent their lives in the region under consideration. To their hospitality I owe the privilege of making an acquaintance with the birds of the vicinity in June 1898 and 1899, and to Dr. Wm. E. Hughes and Mr. Henry W. Fowler, who accompanied me on these trips, I am indebted for many notes.

The brothers, particularly Otto, continued to correspond with Witmer Stone for the next thirty-seven years. The original letters were found in the archives of the Academy of Natural Sciences Library. I have secured copies, and, in addition to the ornithological information they contain, they are a priceless family heirloom.

There is much human interest in the letters. Newsy items co-mingle with natural history information. Otto wrote that he "is delighted that Dr. and Mrs. Stone will be visiting the mountain" and he will pick them up in Lopez with the horse and wagon. A 1910 letter is particularly interesting. Otto stated, "I read in the paper about the trolley strike in Philadelphia" and hopes it won't affect Dr. Stone's getting back and forth to work. So what else is new?

Over the years Otto supplied Witmer Stone with a yearly list of the summering birds. To date these lists have not been found. They would certainly supply much additional information. There is, however, one significant list in the letter collection. It is handwritten on D.V.O.C. stationery with the letterhead crossed out. The handwriting appears to be Witmer Stone's and a note at the top asks that notes be made for each species. The notes are in Otto's handwriting. Unfortunately, no names or dates appear on the list. There are some surprises. Parula Warbler is noted as "abundant." I have not encountered this species at all in recent years. The same is true with the Screech Owl. Conversely, Redstarts, noted by Otto Behr as very rare, are a common species today.

Otto was also an excellent taxidermist. I remember as a small boy looking at his collection with awe and wonderment. Most of the species were the normal inhabitants, but I do remember an Arctic Tern and Wood Stork, both

collected on the mountain. Otto's one remaining daughter, Edith, now in her eighties, donated the collection to a local museum some years ago, but unfortunately Edith cannot remember where it was sent.

When the lumbering tapered off in the early 1900s, Herman Behr left the partnership and went to work for Jennings Brothers Lumber Company, which was in the process of moving its operation to western Maryland and Kentucky. Otto stayed on, continuing to lumber and farm.

Herman retained some two hundred acres from the original land purchase and built a cottage where he spent summer vacations. Recently this property was sold by Herman's two remaining daughters to a Wilkes-Barre contractor. Located on this property is a glacial kettle hole with a floating mat. Pitcher plant, Sundew, Labrador tea and two of the Commonwealth's endangered sedges occur here. Two years ago several of us apprised the Nature Conservancy of this kettle hole, and it has made arrangements with the owner to purchase it, along with some adjoining land.

Over the years, Otto and Herman not only supplied ornithological information to the Academy but also contributed mammal and plant collections. They were regular contributors to *Cassinia* with field notes and an occasional article.

More recently Dr. Edward (Bud) Reimann, former long-standing member of D.V.O.C., birded on Dutch Mountain quite extensively and kept listings for the years 1943 through 1953. I recently had the pleasure of spending a morning on the mountain with him. He is now 76 years of age, but his enthusiasm has not diminished and his hearing and eyesight are still excellent.

As a boy, I spent all my summers on Dutch Mountain. In 1968 I was able to acquire a summer cottage and some ground in the Wyoming County portion of the mountain. If there is a lovelier spot in Pennsylvania I have not seen it. I would echo Jonathan Dwight's sentiments in his 1891 article, "Is this not a bit of Northern Maine?"