

Summer Birds of Western Pike County, Pennsylvania

BY RICHARD C. HARLOW

The primeval forests which once towered above the rugged sides of the Alleghanies are fast becoming a thing of the past, and no more is it possible to journey for days at a time under the shade of the giant hemlocks. With the denudation of the forest land come totally different conditions in the avifauna. Our northern breeders which used to be found commonly over all the higher mountains are gradually being pressed back into favored localities, in which they may still find respite from the hot rays of the sun that beat down upon dead stumps and rocky slopes where once were cool forests and beds of damp moss. It is a sad scene, and one which I know has been dwelt upon time and time again; yet fresh from the contemplation of the changed conditions I feel constrained to add my testimony, as well as my regret for the fearful destruction that axe and fire have wrought. Our only gratification is that there still remain spots where we may still find bits of the original forest remaining, and with them the remnants of the Canadian fauna which was formerly so much more of a feature in the wild life of Pennsylvania. I have been privileged to look upon one of these small bits of timber, woefully small it is true, but just enough to make one hunger for more, and in the following pages I shall endeavor to present such birds as it was there my good fortune to see.

Between the counties of Pike and Wayne, in the northeastern part of the State, the Wallenpaupack creek pushes its way to join the Paupack river. It is a typical mountain stream, harboring numerous trout, and its banks a mass of laurel thickets. The mountains here have been for the most part denuded of their original forest some forty years back, and in the place of the hemlock has sprung up in most cases a deciduous forest of

sugar-maple, birch and chestnut, all these trees reaching a considerable size, while on certain slopes there is naught save a low scrub growth of huckleberry and other shrubs.

In several spots however about the valley of the Wallenpau-pack are to be found small clumps of hemlocks, the principal group being located in the vicinity of Loanna, Pike county. It is in these places, the pitiful remains of the primeval forest, that we find the typical northern birds. Along the creek are dense clumps of rhododendron and laurel, practically impenetrable, and here the Canadian Warbler literally abounds, but it is nearly impossible to find the nest in the protecting fastnesses of the rhododendron.

To this vicinity I have made two trips, the first in August, 1905, and again June 9-16, 1906. The lateness of the season rendered my notes of the first trip of little value so far as indicating the breeding birds of the region; but I have eliminated all those concerning which there was any doubt in this connection, so that my completed list of ninety-four species contains only breeders. Mr. Bayard Long was with me on both trips and Mr. Paul Lorrilliere on the second, and to both of these gentlemen I am under obligations for much valuable assistance. The latter in particular I found to be an excellent arbitrator with rural game wardens and I cheerfully recommend him as such.

On both these trips we stopped in the vicinity of Loanna, Pike Co., and practically all the notes are from Pike rather than Wayne Co. The elevation varies from 1800 to 2000 feet. Of the general Natural History of the region I am able to say but little. Deer are decidedly rare; wildcats common and bear not scarce. Our nearest adventure with a bear was the sight of a cub doing a mile in record time, in an opposite direction from us. Squirrels are abundant, both gray and red, and in 1905 I saw one of the black variety. Coons, foxes, mink, skunks and other small mammals are very common. Flowers were very abundant, many typical northern varieties such as *Clintonia borealis* being noticed. Along with these were several northern butterflies, *e. g.*, *Vanessa milberti*, *Argynnis atlantis*, etc. It was the birds that I was particularly concerned with.

One of the first sights which greeted us on our drive from the station to our lodging-place on the second trip was a Bald Eagle soaring on motionless wings above the valley. This bird though local was not rare, and was usually seen along the borders of some lakes dammed for the production of ice. These lakes also attracted other species. On them we saw our only Night Herons and Green Herons, but very few of either. Ospreys also had their abodes here and about the borders the Nashville Warbler was a rare summer resident. I noted it but once in 1906, a male in full song.

The Great Blue Heron is rare in this region and but two were seen by our party, while only one Woodcock was recorded.

By far the most abundant water bird was the Spotted Sandpiper, which is everywhere a common summer resident. At least four pairs of these birds were nesting about a small mill dam, and it was noticeable that they kept to the open water, not being found in the forests. Just the opposite was the case with a pair of their cousins, the rare Solitary Sandpiper, which I saw in 1905 along with three young. It was in the deepest part of the forest, where the stream tumbled noisily over a sort of log jam, that I came upon them. I could scarcely convince myself that these birds had nested in Pennsylvania, but the size of the young entirely precluded any question of protracted flight, so that I was forced to believe that the parent had been unfortunate in their first attempt at rearing young, and these were the result of a second effort. After a scramble over the logs and the stones, I succeeded in catching one of the young, and having inspected it, released it. In the meantime the parents showed but little concern over my action, though one, probably the male,* silently flew several times about me. The rest of the young had hidden among the logs, and upon releasing my captive he rushed out into deep water and proceeded to *swim* for the logs. The current was too strong, however, and took him past and on down stream. I was just becoming apprehensive as to his safety, when he climbed upon a stone and bowed in his best form.

* Cf. *Oölogist*, March, 1906, p. 39.

Another denizen of these mountain streams is the Water Thrush. Both species were found, but in my experience *S. noveboracensis* was the most common. *S. motacilla* seemed rare and shy. On June 12 we were close to the nest of the latter, but searched for it in vain.

All through these woods are found the Ruffed Grouse. Their young were about four or five days old when we arrived, and every day we would meet with one or more broods. The little ones were adepts in hiding, while their parents fairly outdid themselves in attempting to draw us from them. After the failure of the broken-wing tactics, they invariably tried to frighten us. Puffing themselves up after the manner of a Sandpiper, they would approach cautiously, all the time uttering a distinct hissing sound, and finally becoming disgusted at their vain endeavors would fly away. These birds were heard to drum frequently.

Hawks and Owls are rather common. The Sharp-shinned is seen frequently yet is by no means common, while the Cooper's is scarce. The Red-tail and Red-shouldered are both common, the former the more so. Several nests were observed far up in hemlocks. The Broad-winged Hawk was noticed in 1905. Of the Owls the Screech Owl is of course the most common, while the Barred is taken frequently, but the Great Horned is the best known Owl of the region. They are frequently shot, and to our delight we were serenaded by them on June 14. According to tradition these birds may always be found at a locality called "Owl Hoot," where they nest.

Doves were common and in song. Of the Cuckoos the Black-billed was the only one noticed and was everywhere common as was the Kingfisher in suitable localities.

Both the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers are found commonly and nest, and on both trips I met the lordly Pileated Woodpecker which seems to be of regular occurrence though rare. Contrary to my expectations they were not hard to approach. Numerous dead hemlocks attested to the drilling powers of their bills, and I was led at great labor to climb one of the great trunks in search of a nest only to find that the hole "did not go down."

I was glad to hear the harsh note of the Sapsucker on June 12, and later to see the bird in its summer home.

The orchards were the homes of the Flycatchers and they were in abundance; the Kingbird, Great Crested Flycatcher and Wood Pewee, and about every barn and bridge the Phoebe; but they were all surpassed in abundance by the homely Chebec. This was *the* bird of the orchards and was everywhere one of the most abundant birds. Singularly enough the one nest which I found was not in the usual situation, but in a birch in the woods. Next to the Chebec the Cedarbird was the most common bird in the fruit trees; practically every orchard having its pair and some several. One thing that struck me was the fact that nearly every pair I observed began building on exactly the same date,—June 10. In orchards and woodlands the Flicker as usual was found abundantly.

Every evening the Nighthawks would gather in small bands and sail back and forth in the gloaming, uttering their discordant cries. These continued until dark when the Whip-poor-wills took up the refrain. Both these birds were more common than the Chimney Swift, which was found in only limited numbers nesting frequently in barns. Of the Hummingbirds there were more than I have ever seen before: one nest was found on June 12. One of the most interesting birds which it was my privilege to meet was the Prairie Horned Lark. The summits of several of the mountains about Loanna consist entirely of upland meadows, flat stretches of land with no trees whatever. Very little bird life is to be observed in these situations, a few Meadowlarks, Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows being about all. It was in these places that we came upon this bird, and so far as I could ascertain they were regular, being observed on both trips. When not nesting they travel aimlessly about after the manner of their northern relatives in winter. In 1905 I saw them several times in flocks of about seven individuals, evidently family parties, but in 1906 they were seen chiefly in pairs. One of these birds evidently had a nest in a field where the young grain was about three inches high, but though both male and female frequently flew in with grasshoppers in their beaks, we sought in vain. Mr. Lorrilliere first suggested to me

the similarity of their flight to that of the Bluebird. The only note which I heard them utter was essentially the same as that of the typical *O. alpestris*.

In these same pastures we noted the Savanna Sparrow evidently nesting in small numbers. Occasionally these little birds would dart out from under one's foot and speed away, resembling the Sharptailed Sparrow of the salt marshes.

Crows are found commonly in this county, but they are not such a feature as in the Delaware Valley. Already in June they were traveling about in small bands, for after the nesting season, Crows seem to wish for company, and the Pike county individuals are no exception.

The Blue Jay is rather common and well distributed, and their discordant cries are heard throughout the wooded districts.

We were startled one day by an ominous cry from down in the valley far below us. It was the unmistakable "crunch, crunch" of a Raven. We did not see the bird but it was reported as of occasional occurrence, and I am satisfied that we could not have been mistaken in the note.

There were few open swamps and Redwinged Blackbirds were necessarily scarce, but I was at a loss to account for the apparent rarity of the Cowbird, as on the two trips but three individuals were noted. Rather more common is the Meadowlark, which is to be found in all suitable fields though abundant nowhere. Along the roads, about houses, and in the orchards was found the Baltimore Oriole. Never before have I heard Orioles sing so richly as those of Loanna. It is one of my most treasured memories of the place. The Grackles were not common here and I saw only one or two. Whether they were *aeneus* or *quiscula* I cannot say, but I presume they were *aeneus*.

On June 15th while strolling along a road through the open country a flock of birds about the size of Bobolinks flew over our heads at a considerable distance and soon were lost to sight. Later in the afternoon, while still wondering what they were, we came upon the whole flock perched in some walnut trees. A glance told us they were American Crossbills. The flock of about thirty contained both mature and immature birds, though the latter predominated. They were by no means shy but sat contentedly,

some high, some low, in the walnut trees, frequently giving utterance to a metallic "chuck." This note was also sounded when on the wing; their actions reminded me exactly of their behavior at lower altitudes in winter and seemed to brand them as aimless wanderers.

In 1905 the Purple Finch was one of the features of this county. In the orchards and in the hemlocks they were to be found still uttering their ringing song. We were, therefore, looking forward to renewing their acquaintance, but they had gone, and only a casual one or two were to be seen.

Goldfinches, however, were abundant everywhere, except in the deep woods, and they, like the Cedarbirds, impressed me with being more abundant in this region than I had ever seen them elsewhere. Chipping, Field and Song Sparrows were also plentiful, and in the clearings the Towhee and Indigobird were apparently increasing in numbers. It has only been in recent years that these latter birds have been found in this region, but they are now firmly established. The huckleberry barrens, where they are now frequently to be seen, are also the haunt of the Chestnut-sided Warbler, while the Red-eyed Vireo frequents the taller trees that are scattered here and there.

Where the barrens meet the hemlock forest we found the Black and White Warblers. We were too late for their eggs, as the two nests I discovered both held five young. One of these was placed two feet up in a hole of a decaying stump. The Scarlet Tanagers likewise reared their young on the edge of the hemlocks, a nest being found on June 13th.

All through the town of Loanna and the surrounding country are found the Barn and Cliff Swallows in equal numbers. The latter have several small colonies in the town, the largest comprising about seventeen pairs. So far as I can learn, these birds do not encroach upon each other's territory. The irregularity of the Cliff Swallows in nesting particularly impressed me, some having full-fledged young, while others were but laying the foundations of their nests. About the ponds the Tree Swallow is also found, but they were by no means common.

However interesting is the country already mentioned, the hemlock wood was our delight. One of the first birds to be

noticed there was the Magnolia Warbler. Everywhere we heard the sprightly song of the male far up in the hemlocks. Of all the Warblers in this region, I should call this the most abundant. The nests are loosely-made structures of coniferous twigs, and from five feet to twenty feet above the ground. One taken on June 11th held four fresh eggs. The parents are very fearless in the protection of their homes, flitting about with expanded tails like the Redstart, and uttering a startled "chip." From far up in the hemlocks we could hear the "que-e-e" of the Olive-sided Flycatcher, and on August 20, 1905, I was fortunate enough to come upon a family of these birds, parents and three young. The latter, though fully able to fly, continually followed the old ones about the hemlocks with drooping wings and expanded tails, frequently uttering their "que-e" and begging for food. With the Olive-sided Flycatcher, the Golden-crowned Kinglet is found, but all search for their nests was in vain. In a single clump of giant hemlocks two or three pairs were located by the songs of the males. This is an energetic effort well described by Chapman, and the performer is far more easily heard than seen. The Kinglets seem to frequent the very tops of the tallest trees, and in a whole morning spent in watching them we did not see one at a closer range than fifty feet. Under these difficulties, and with innumerable hordes of bloodthirsty mosquitoes, it is small wonder that nests are rarely found.

In company with the Kinglets the Blackburnian and Black-throated Green Warblers are found, and rather to my surprise we met with the Pine Warbler frequently, and their Chippy-like song was a feature of some sections of the woods. Very often was the insect-like "zee-zee-zee-zee" of the Black-throated Blue Warbler heard, and Mr. Long found a beautiful little nest on June 17th. The Black-throated Blue by no means confines itself to any one kind of land, but was found everywhere—in the swampy undergrowth, either in the high deciduous trees, or far up in the hemlocks. Of course the Ovenbird is found breeding commonly all through these woods, and their habits are essentially the same as in the lower Delaware valley. In the low laurel thickets along the streams the Canadian

Warbler literally abounds, and its song is constantly heard. This seems to me to differ from most warbler songs, being more energetic, after the manner of the *Geothlypis* group than like the drowsy *Dendroica* music.

With them occur the Redstarts and the Juncos. The latter are particularly common, and breed in various situations, but chiefly along the trails and pathways. All through the woodland, but especially near the streams, are the Chickadees, giving vent to their feelings in their pleasing, familiar whistle, and with them occurred now and then a song that we could only identify with the Tufted Titmouse. We could not trust our ears when we first heard it, but closer observation proved that we were correct. I am at a loss to account for the presence of this Carolinian species in this Canadian environment, but suppose it entered from the upper Delaware valley not many miles away, and, as has already been said, present conditions favor the advance of southern birds and the retreat of boreal ones in the Pennsylvania forest area.

Four other Warblers besides those already mentioned were seen by our party: the Yellow Warbler, abundant in orchards and open willow thickets along the streams; the Maryland Yellowthroat in its usual haunts; the Golden-winged Warbler, evidently rare, as only one was seen, and the Yellow-breasted Chat. The last is another southerner which probably reached this section by the same route as the Tufted Titmouse. In the same scrub-land where we noticed the Chat, the Brown Thrasher and Catbird were common, especially the latter.

One species remains which we found frequently in the hemlock woods, the Solitary Vireo. Its song is really beautiful, and justice has not been done to it. One nest was found in a hemlock some five feet up. The female sat very close, but would not let me touch her. The Solitary Vireo is found especially common in the swampy sections of the forest, where the song might be called a feature.

In the same locality the Winter Wren is seen, but is by no means common. His cousin, however, the House Wren, was as abundant as usual about the village, where also we found the Warbling and Yellow-throated Vireos, both rare, and the Rose-

breasted Grosbeak. The Grosbeak, however, is much more abundant in the second growth near the hemlock forest, where the rich song of the male was constantly in our ears. In one tree we actually counted seven males in full song. This should suffice to show their abundance.

The Robin and Bluebird were in their usual numbers, and in the woodland the Wood Thrush upheld the reputation of his family, while overhead the White-bellied Nuthatch "yanked" the grubs from the dead wood for a family of seven young arranged over a surface of bark about two feet square.

The chief disappointment of the trips was the absence of the Hermit and Wilson's Thrushes, which seems unaccountable. I noted both rarely in 1905, but as I saw neither of them last June I do not feel justified in giving them as breeders. Our complete list of breeding birds numbered ninety-four species, all positively identified, with the exception of the Raven.