

LANCASTER COUNTY BIRD CLUB

BULLETIN



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LANCASTER COUNTY EMINENTLY WELL FITTED FOR VARIED BIRD LIFE

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Lancaster County as a region of rich and varied avifauna is equaled by few and excelled, perhaps, by none of similar area in eastern North America. Eight factors contribute to this highly generalized character. In the order of their relative importance, these are:

First. The zonal contact location of the county. All life, plant and animal, exists in irregularly latitudinal bands bounded by isothermal lines across the continent. There are seven of these zones recognized in the East, i.e., the Arctic; Hudsonian; Canadian Transition or Louisianian; and at the point of Florida, Tropical. Certain plants and animals are associated together within these zones. The zonal contacts, though often irregular or diffused, chiefly on account of local topography, are usually fairly well defined. Lancaster County is situated where the Alleghenian and Carolinian zones come together. The northern, eastern and central townships are almost purely Alleghenian. The river townships of the southwestern border have a strongly Carolinian character, which is carried northward diminishingly in the immediate valley of the Susquehanna, chiefly, perhaps, by the climatic influence of that great body of water. The river hills in Fulton, Drumore, Martic and Conestoga Townships, and within them the wooded valleys of the tributary streams near the Susquehanna, most strikingly exhibit this Carolinian element; though it is not absent at the Dauphin County line, nor to the eastward at Millersville on the Conestoga and in Providence, East Drumore and Little Britain Townships.

Second. The position of the County is one of the most important channels of migration in eastern North America. The axis of the Susquehanna is approximately in longitudinal line with the eastern end of Lake Ontario. This fact, perhaps, explains in part the diverse range of Canadian and Hudsonian summer residents which regularly visit the County in the fall and spring while passing to and from their winter ranges in the Southern States and South America.

Third. The vast territory of river - almost a hundred square miles - within the County. The Susquehanna, a few miles below the Mason and Dixon line, widens out into the Susquehanna Flats, which since it was recorded in the log of John Smith, has been known as one of the three or four regions along the Atlantic seaboard most frequented by wild fowl. All of the ducks, geese, swans and other water birds which congregate in spring, fall and winter on the Flats are met with in greater or less abundance in our river townships. As a continuation of the Chesapeake system the Susquehanna is a thoroughfare for Louisianian species like the Little Blue Heron and even Tropical water birds like the Roseate Spoonbill on their northward wanderings in August and September. This latter feature, while it is relatively a minor element in the bird life of the County, is sufficiently strong and distinctive in a greater region to be of marked interest in the ornithology of eastern North America. Doubtless many species of aquatic migrants, southern wanderers, and maritime birds have followed the great water course into the County and have passed unrecorded, for the chances have always been heavily against their being seen by capable observers.

Fourth. Large, continuous tracts of woodland. In Elizabeth, Clay, West Cocalico, Brecknock, Caernarvon, Salisbury and Bart Townships to the north and east, and in Fulton, Drumore, and Martic along the river, there are in the aggregate several hundred square miles of wood and brushland, dominantly of hardwood

in character. This continuous cover, favorable to certain birds, is supplemented in all the townships by wood lots and brushy hillsides, which furnish slightly different conditions for nesting.

Fifth. Stream, meadow and swampland. The profuse, well-spread drainage system of the County, consisting of tributaries of the Susquehanna, the Conestoga and the Octoraro, with their ramifying brooks and runs, supplies numerous millponds and make possible soft bottomlands of open tussock meadow and alder swamp. The Big Swamp at the headwaters of the Middle Creek in Clay Township is probably the largest continuous tract of swampland in southeastern Pennsylvania west of the Delaware marshes. This water system furnishes food and cover for a large group of transient and resident swamp and shore birds.

Sixth. The vast acreage of broad, open farmland. The rolling uplands of large, well-kept fields, particularly the central townships, that have contributed most to Lancaster County's agricultural supremacy, have gradually developed summer ranges for a group of species like the Upland Plover and the Vesper Sparrow, which were rare or entirely absent in the region two centuries ago.

Seventh. The winter range character. The weather and temperature conditions of the County are such that it is not too far north for certain southern species like the Turkey Vulture and the Blue Grosbeak, nor too far south for winter visitants from the Hudsonian and Arctic zones like the Goshawk and the Snowy Owl. As a result a study of the winter birdlife is always made interesting by its element of the unexpected.

Eighth. The pine barrens of the extreme south end. A belt of serpentine enters Fulton and Little Britain Townships from Chester County and Maryland. The soil is so thin on parts of this rock formation that they are brought into sharp botanical contrast with the more fertile lands adjoining. This region of sedge grass, sparse post and barren oak, pitch pine and red cedar, furnishes haunts congenial to a few species like the Prairie Warbler, which are characteristic of the similarly specialized country of southern New Jersey. The Heath Hen, now extinct, probably lived before the advent of the white man, on these barrens, which were then the only botanically open parts of what is now Lancaster County.

-- Herbert H. Beck

(From A Chapter on the Ornithology of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania)

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AFFILIATION WITH THE PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

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The Lancaster County Bird Club is now affiliated with the Pennsylvania Academy of Science. The Academy is much interested in the work being done by societies composed of amateurs, like ourselves, and wants to encourage such groups. In return for our affiliation we will receive help in obtaining good lecturers for our club program. We will receive two copies monthly of the Science News Letter and one copy of the Annual Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Academy of Science. Members of the club may have access to these publications by asking the secretary, Miss Ruth Sener, for them. Our affiliation dues are \$3.00 annually. We are to be represented by a member of the club on the Science Service Committee of that organization.

Excerpts from the Science Service Committee report presented by Dr. Robert B. Gordon, Chairman, West Chester State Teachers College, at the meeting of the Academy in Harrisburg in April and published in the Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Academy of Science Vol. XVII, 1943, are as follows:

"It was soon apparent that nowhere in Pennsylvania is there a complete list or directory of groups of amateur scientists except in the Philadelphia region, where the Philadelphia Council of Amateur Scientists has been organized through the efforts of W. Stephen Thomas and a committee of scientists. A complete directory has been published and is available from the American Philosophical Society, which has sponsored the work of Mr. Thomas' Committee on Education and Participation in Science.

"One of the first jobs, therefore, which faces the Academy before it can be of service to various groups in the State is to compile a sort of Scientific Directory - to include all science organizations in the State, as well as all local museums, arboreta and botanical conservatories, zoological collections,---. This could well be compiled and published as a special supplement to the Proceedings of the Academy, with corrections and additions published annually in the Proceedings; and complete revision at longer intervals. ---

"The committee also favored the publication of a monthly News-Letter or P. A. S. bulletins to inform members and affiliated clubs of special science club programs, outstanding lectures, seminars, and conferences to be scheduled in the following months, also news of pending legislation and activities of State and Federal agencies which might affect the natural resources of the State favorably or unfavorably. ---

"The committee suggested that the larger museums in Pennsylvania be encouraged to launch more widespread educational programs within their respective regions to include traveling exhibits and mobile laboratories to reach smaller communities which do not share the educational opportunities available to citizens in metropolitan areas, ---

"Although much material is published every year by scientific institutions in Pennsylvania other than the Pennsylvania Academy of Science, the Academy has never prepared an index to such publications, which treat specifically of conditions in this State, - its natural resources, its agriculture and forestry, its flora, fauna, geological features, soils and climates. This in itself would make a valuable supplement to the Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Academy. ---"

Among other societies affiliated with the Academy are the Mengel Natural History Society of Reading, the Philadelphia Science Teachers Association, the York Bird Club, and the Muhlenberg Botanical Club, Lancaster, Pa.

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NEWS NOTES

Bird Club Members in the Service

CHARLES BOWMAN, Lititz, is in the Navy and is somewhere in the Aleutian Islands. SGT. DONALD GARNER, another Lititz boy, is a para-trooper in North Africa. PAUL FOREMAN, Lititz, is in a training camp in Mississippi. SGT. WILLIAM LIGHT, Lititz, is an aerial photographer in the Army. He has been

in Denver, Colo., Spokane, Wash., and other places and is now in S. America. PVT. MERLE DIFFENDERFER, Lititz Pike, Lancaster, is in the Telephone Division, U.S.A., stationed at Camp McCain, Miss.

TECHNICAL CORPORAL ELBERT NIXDORF, Lancaster has been for about six weeks on man-ouvers in the mountains of western Virginia, in the region of Douthat State Park. He says the country is very beautiful, with many birds and animals in evidence. Many warblers were nesting there and he found it tantalizing not to have time to study them, as their voices were not all familiar to him. One night, doing guard duty, a racoon walked around very close to him. He is now back at Camp Meade and is expecting a furlough home at any moment.

C. L. CAMP, a former member of the Club, is now in the office of the Chief of Engineers, with headquarters in Washington, D. C. He jumps about all over the country, mostly by air, which he enjoys but says it does not give him as good an opportunity to observe birds as would travel on the ground. In a letter to a club member written in July he said that in the last eight days he had been in Seattle, Wash., Portland, Ore., San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino, Cal. Shortly before that he was in Miami, Fla. where he had a few days vacation. He immediately dashed down to Tavernier, on Key Largo, where he went out on Florida Bay with Warden Eifler of the Audubon Society, hoping to see a few roseate spoonbills. Instead of a few they saw fifty spoonbills, also great white herons, reddish egrets, royal terns, pelicans, short tailed hawk, wood ibises, etc.

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ALTERNATE MEETINGS WITH THE MUHLENBERG BOTANICAL CLUB

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The Executive Committees of the Lancaster County Bird Club and the Muhlenberg Botanical Club voted, as a war time emrgency, to alternate meetings each month during the season of 1943-1944. War time uncertainties make it impossible to schedule good speakers a long time ahead. Therefore, neither club has prepared their season's program in advance. The members of the Muhlenberg Club are invited to attend the meetings of the Bird Club and vice versa. The secretaries of the respective clubs will send notices of meetings as usual to their own members. Bird Club members should watch the newspapers for notices of Muhlenberg Botanical Club meetings. Muhlenberg Club members should do likewise for Bird Club meetings.

As far as possible the second Thursday of the month will be the meeting date of both clubs. However, the present difficult conditions make it necessary to take outstanding speakers when we can get them, not when we want them. Any changes from the usual schedule are explained by this fact. Thus, when we found that we could present Mr. Harwell in October we decided to omit the usual September meeting to take advantage of this opportunity. Therefore, there will be a Bird Club meeting in November, our regular date. The speaker for this meeting and his subject will be announced later.

On Monday, October 25, the Muhlenberg Botanical Club will present Mulford B. Foster of Orlando, Fla. in Goethean Hall, Franklin and Marshall College campus, at 8:15 P.M. His subject will be "Exploring South American Jungles with the Color Camera." This was Mr. Foster's only available date in the Philadelphia area. He and Mrs. Foster collect and photograph tropical orchids.

BIRDS IN A CITY GARDEN

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The City Garden in question - on Charlotte Street between Chestnut and Walnut Streets in Lancaster, Pa. - is about half a mile as the crow flies from Penn Square, the hub of a city which, with its suburbs, has a population of about 75,000. The half block on which these bird observations are made is occupied by four large homes and a grade school. All the streets in the neighborhood and leading outward to the suburbs are lined with large, fairly old trees, principally maples of three or four varieties, and there are several other large and many small well-kept and well-treed gardens in the immediate neighborhood, tho on the whole Lancaster is a city of rather closely built homes.

The half block where these observations are made, consists of open lawn, flower beds, many bushes and shrubs, and a large variety of shade, nut and fruit trees, the majority of them large and old. Among these are many white ash, honey locusts and maples, several linden, elms and horse chestnuts, a black walnut, an English walnut, a large shag-bark hickory, a very large wild cherry and tulip, and a smaller mulberry, also several pines, larches and hemlocks and a hedge of fairly large spruce trees. There are also a number of dogwoods, several crabs, and a native large-leaf magnolia, and an apple, a pear and several cherry trees, whose seeds and fruits are enjoyed by the birds.

The observer has kept observation records spasmodically since the turn of the century, but it is only during the past ten years that these records have been consecutive, tho childhood remembrance is still vivid of a Woodcock under a favorite old apple tree, and a Crossbill found stunned or exhausted on the front lawn.

The following observations have been made during the decade 1933-43. Some of the more unusual warrant comment. The total numbers 89 species.

Sparrow Hawk	Red-eyed Vireo
Bob-white	Warbling Vireo
Ring-necked Pheasant	Black and White Warbler
Woodcock #	Nashville Warbler
Mourning Dove	Parula Warbler
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Yellow Warbler
Black-billed Cuckoo	Magnolia Warbler
Screech Owl	Cape May Warbler
Snowy Owl #	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Whip-poor-will	Myrtle Warbler
Nighthawk	Black-throated Green Warbler
Chimney Swift	Blackburnian Warbler
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Flicker.	Bay-breasted Warbler
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Black-poll Warbler
Downy Woodpecker	Pine Warbler #
Kingbird	Ovenbird
Crested Flycatcher	Louisiana Water Thrush
Phoebe	Mourning Warbler #
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher #	Maryland Yellow-throat
Acadian Flycatcher #	Yellow-breasted Chat
Least Flycatcher	Hooded Warbler #
Wood Pewee	Wilson's Warbler

Blue Jay
 Black-capped Chickadee #
 Tufted Titmouse
 White-breasted Nuthatch
 Red-breasted Nuthatch
 Brown Creeper
 House Wren
 Carolina Wren #
 Catbird
 Brown Thrasher
 Robin
 Wood Thrush
 Hermit Thrush
 Olive-backed Thrush
 Gray-cheeked Thrush
 Wilson's Thrush
 Golden-crowned Kinglet
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
 Cedar Waxwing
 Starling
 Yellow-throated Vireo
 Solitary Vireo

Canada Warbler
 Redstart
 English Sparrow
 Orchard Oriole
 Baltimore Oriole
 Purple Grackle
 Cowbird
 Scarlet Tanager
 Cardinal
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak
 Indigo Bunting
 Purple Finch
 Goldfinch
 Towhee
 Slate-colored Junco
 Chipping Sparrow
 Field Sparrow
 White-crowned Sparrow
 White-throated Sparrow
 Fox Sparrow
 Song Sparrow

Wakened on the morning of May 22, 1939, shortly after six, by the resounding whistle of a bona-fide Bob-White (no mere Starling imitation) the observer turned her binoculars down the garden to try, unsuccessfully, to locate the unusual visitor, when what should she see instead but a Woodcock probing the soft soil under the rhododendron bushes along the division fence. The Woodcock was seen later in the day in my garden and was twice flushed from the closely planted flower beds next door. On May 14, 1942, a Woodcock was again in the garden. The Bob-White was not seen, but there was no mistaking its call.

The Snowy Owl was the outstanding show of the decade. At 4:30 P.M. on Dec. 1, 1941, the year of the last southward flight of Snowys, I saw a large white bird flying overhead, which alighted on the large square chimney of the school building, where it perched for some fifteen minutes. From the upper windows of my home, some seventy-five feet away, my family had a splendid view of the bird as it looked down its spine at loitering school children in the yard below, stretched its wings and preened its feathers, and the observer meanwhile made frantic but unsuccessful efforts to reach members of the Bird Club by 'phone. Thru the binoculars the black markings on the tips of feathers of face and body were distinctly seen. The bird finally flew away southward over the city. Two days before this bird was seen the Snowy, which had been in the neighborhood of Reading, Pa. for several weeks, disappeared. Was it the same bird?

I have three records of Whip-Poor-Wills for the decade, in the first week of May of the years 1935, '40 and '41, when they were close enough to wake me in the early morning hours.

My note on the Yellow bellied Flycatcher, for May 28, 1938, is that its "belly was distinctly yellow" and my recollection is that its wings were distinctly yellow underneath, also. On the Acadian Flycatcher, on August 31, 1940, my note is - "Sultry with heavy rain, many flycatchers and warblers about, including a number of very yellow flycatchers which would seem to be Acadian - too large and too yellow on the back for Least, not yellow enough beneath for Yellow Belly."

I realize that the members of this group of flycatchers are ticklish to identify, and possibly in this instance my observations should be taken with the grain of salt which I failed to get on the bird's tails.

Strange as it may seem such common birds as the Kingbird, White Breasted Nuthatch and Tufted Titmouse I have seen only once in my garden during these ten years, and the Crested Flycatcher twice. Black Capped Chickadees also appeared only once - a small flock of about a dozen on January 28, 1942 - the winter of Chickadees, and one remained until April 16th or later, enjoying the bird feeder and a (supposedly starling-proof) box of cracked nuts hung for him in the hickory tree.

The Carolina Wren appears occasionally in the garden, usually laye ih June or in July - six records in the ten years. He usually sings when here.

The Mourning Warbler was seen clearly on two occasions - May 28, '38, and June 2, '41. On both occasions I had good views of the bird and heard it sing. In '41 it was in the bushes all morning and I saw it repeatedly.

On August 30, 1935, I had a short but distinct view of a Hooded Warbler as it flew down momentarily into the grass from a cherry tree. I have the following note on the Pine Warbler for September 25, 1935 - "A Pine Warbler flew against the dining room window today and was killed. Could not identify it, so sent it to Dr. H. J. Roddy at Franklin and Marshall College, who verified his decision after consulting Dr. H. H. Beck. Evidently rather rare here." If I remember correctly it was a female and Dr. Roddy studied long and late over it, finally identifying it by the small white patch in the tail.

Our winter residents on Charlotte Street are limited in number and not all here every year, but they usually are, besides sparrows and starlings:- Downy Woodpecker, Cardinal and Junco, and frequently a Screech Owl.

Summer nesting residents on the block, or appearing here with young which they are feeding are:- Chimney Swift, which nests in hoards in the school chimneys; Flicker, House Wren, Catbird, Robin, Starling, Red Eyed Vireo, English Sparrow, Grackle, Cardinal and Song Sparrow. Those seen here regularly during the summer are Mourning Dove, Nighthawk, Humming Bird, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay and Goldfinch; and Waxwings when the mulberries are ripe.

Obviously the great majority of birds listed as seen on Charlotte Street are migrants, and usually appear here later in the migratory season than they do in the city suburbs, but they are a good example of the birds that can be seen in a favorable locality, even in the heart of a city.

-- Ruth Sener

FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF BIRDS BY THEIR PLUMAGE

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For more than a hundred years the ornithologists of Lancaster County have been recording the different species of birds which occur within the borders of the county, and up until the present time the number recorded has almost reached the three hundred mark.

Many of these birds are rare, a few are extinct, but about two hundred species are of fairly regular occurrence each year. The experienced field observer calls upon his knowledge of plumage, song, flight, size, form, etc., to make satisfactory identification of these birds, while the novice must usually depend upon plumage alone.

Most of these birds are marked distinctly enough to make satisfactory identification merely a question of securing a good look at the bird but some species resemble others so closely that a knowledge of the very slight difference in their markings is necessary to name the birds accurately.

Following are a few examples of species which are almost identical in plumage and the markings which will serve to distinguish them:

Semipalmated Sandpiper - legs and feet black

Least Sandpiper - legs and feet greenish or greenish yellow

Downy Woodpecker - outer tail feathers white with black bars

Hairy Woodpecker - outer tail feathers pure white

Chipping Sparrow - white line over eye, chestnut cap; occurs in summer

Field Sparrow - bill pink; occurs in summer

Tree Sparrow - large dusky spot in middle of plain gray breast;
occurs in winter

Bank Swallow - wings and tail darker than back, brown band across breast

Rough Winged Swallow - upper parts uniform in color

Louisiana Water Thrush - line over eye white, underparts whitish

Water Thrush - line over eye buffy, underparts, yellowish or buffy

Olive Backed Thrush - sides of head buffy, distinct eye-ring buffy

Gray-Checked Thrush - sides of head grey, indistinct eye-ring white

-- Carl Fasnacht