

## MERRIAM'S ADIRONDACK LIST

The Adirondack region in northeastern New York has been defined in a number of ways. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (1965 edition) it covers five thousand square miles and is bounded by Lake Champlain, the St. Lawrence River and the Mohawk River valley. As the state became settled the heavily wooded Adirondack country with its rugged terrain was bypassed and remained virtually untouched for many years.

The region became famous for hunting and fishing, and late in the nineteenth century the era of resorts began. Nonetheless until recent times it remained largely wilderness. Penetration by highways and railroads accompanied by extensive lumbering has now materially altered its character.

For a few years in the early 1880's Clinton Hart Merriam, following graduation from medical school, practiced at Locust Grove, a small community north of Boonville. During this period he studied the bird life of Lewis County as well as portions of the western Adirondacks lying to the east. This resulted in the publication of an annotated list of 211 species entitled "Preliminary List of Birds Ascertained to Occur in the Adirondack Region, Northeastern New York." This was published in the Nuttall Ornithological Club Bulletin (Vol. 6 #4), with three later addenda. Together these constitute the first comprehensive report on the birds of the area, although mention should be made of a somewhat earlier list of summer birds observed near Paul Smith's in Franklin County compiled by Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Davis Minot.

Unfortunately Merriam did not define the area covered by his report. It is evident that the term "Adirondack Region" was used loosely, and that some observations were made in peripheral areas not strictly representative of the "Adirondack Wilderness." For example, a number of shorebirds and ducks are designated as having been seen "along Lake Champlain." It would appear that where observations were made by someone other than Merriam, credit is given. Dr. A. K. Fisher, a classmate in medical school, evidently carried out field work at Lake George since a number of summer records are included on his authority.

Merriam's report was prepared prior to the issuance of the first A.O.U. Checklist and some of the common names of birds differ from those used later. Thus we find Titlark, now Water Pipit; Blue Yellow-backed Warbler, now Parula Warbler; Black and Yellow Warbler, now Magnolia Warbler; Grass Finch, now Vesper Sparrow; White-winged Gull, now Iceland Gull; Little Blackhead, now Lesser Scaup.

Merriam included the Willow Ptarmigan on the strength of a specimen taken in Watson, Lewis County in 1876. It is described as "a male, in

changing plumage, mostly white but with brown head and neck." Eaton (1909) accepts this record but Reilly & Parkes (1959) question it, with the comment "hypothetical, one specimen 1876, identification doubted; specimen lost." Could this have been an albino Ruffed or Spruce Grouse? It might be added that the A.O.U. checklist (Fifth Edition, 1957) includes Watson, Lewis County, N.Y. in the extralimital range of the Willow Ptarmigan.

The Whistling Swan is given as a possible breeding species on the authority of DeKay (1844). However, the extreme northern distribution of this species precludes the likelihood of its breeding in New York State. One species whose status has changed radically since the time of Merriam is the Raven. According to his report the Raven was "a common resident throughout the Adirondacks." Comments on the Loggerhead (White-rumped) Shrike are interesting: "They now breed throughout Lewis County and have extended their range into all congenial spots within the Adirondack Wilderness." This shrike is partial to open country rather than heavily wooded areas and one wonders how many "congenial spots" it would find in the big woods.

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#### FIELD NOTES

**A New Glossy Ibis Colony at Cedar Beach, New York:** During May, 1971, Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) established a colony along the ocean parkway at Cedar Beach, Suffolk County. On 1 July, I penetrated the colony and estimated, by running