

OPPORTUNITY UNLIMITED FOR NEW YORK BIRD WATCHERS

Every year, bird watchers in New York state spend hundreds of thousands of hours afield. A few of these people are professionals, with some specific aim in view. Most of them are amateurs, as we are, trying to build up a large annual list, to see birds they have never seen before, in short, enjoying the game of birding. The results of their labors may be summarized as follows:

1. They build up large lists and learn to know more birds, a source of great personal satisfaction.
2. They add to the knowledge of seasonal and geographical distribution, though much of this knowledge is unorganized.
3. They secure a few accidental or unusual records, which are exciting, but of little real importance.
4. They have a tremendous amount of healthful relaxation and enjoyment.

Could this time afield have been spent in such a way as to have been equally enjoyable, providing equal personal satisfaction, relaxation and pleasure, but adding more to our knowledge of birds? We think so. The average amateur is in a position to add to our knowledge of birds by concentrating on some small subject, rather than shot-gunning his efforts at the birds in general. All that is needed is a little thought, some small amount of direction, and such ambition as must be present for the individual to be an active birder in the first place.

Now let's get down to cases. What projects can be suggested which might occupy the attention of field workers in New York state? The first and most important project is the state bird book, now in its planning stages.

To make this the kind of book it should be, the help of every bird watcher in the state will be needed. Some of the information needed will be:

1. Precise data on numbers of migrating birds at different dates and places.
2. Composition of migratory flocks.
3. Direction of migratory flights, spring and fall.
4. Correlation of migratory flights with weather conditions.
5. Exact composition of breeding bird populations of all types of areas throughout the state.
6. Distribution of these birds in relation to vegetation, water, light, altitude, topography, height from ground, etc.
7. Nesting data: incubation periods; size of clutch; survival of young to fledgling stage; rate of growth; food, etc.
8. Behavior of birds: courtship; nesting; incubation by male and female; how much and when by each sex; approach to the nest; reaction to observer; defense of home territory; size of territory; song perches; song season, etc.
9. Relationship of birds to other birds, mammals, etc.: predators, parasites, competitors for food, food species.
10. Composition of winter bird flocks; records of hawk and owl flights; checking records of local taxidermists to determine dates of large flights and discover rare specimens.
11. Better coverage of unstudied areas: Tug Hill; parts of the Adirondacks and Catskills; smaller areas throughout the state.

Does all this sound over the head of the average birder? In the last two years, at least two books have been published which were written by amateurs and hailed by ornithologists as notable contributions to bird study. Probably none of you will write a book about your observations, but you can accumulate part of the information needed for the writing of a book: our state bird book.

From the viewpoint of personal satisfaction, perhaps having a part in the state book is not enough. What other thrill, comparable to that of building a big list, can be expected from this kind of work? Your list may fall off a little, and you have a right to expect some compensating satisfaction.

The first thrill is the thrill of discovery — to be the first to learn some facts about birds. To us, this is a greater thrill than adding a new bird to the annual list. The fact may not be particularly important, but you have made yourself the leading expert in some small portion of ornithology.

Secondly, if you carry on your researches, you will find it easy to have them published in an ornithological journal. *The Kingbird* is the normal outlet for papers of this type. If you wish to aim at a national publication, don't feel that they are above your range. Look at any issue of *The Auk* or *The Wilson Bulletin*. Here are some titles chosen at random from the

1952 issues of the *Auk*. Any of you might have done one of these, or a similar one.

"Sex displays of the Slate-colored Junco"

"Nesting of Clay-Colored Sparrow"

"Observations on re-mating in the American Robin"

"A warning call of the American Robin"

"Notes on song cessation"

Here is the opportunity and the challenge. We hope many of you will respond to it.

Allen H. Benton,
New York State College for Teachers, Albany,
and

Robert Arbib,
The Linnaean Society of New York