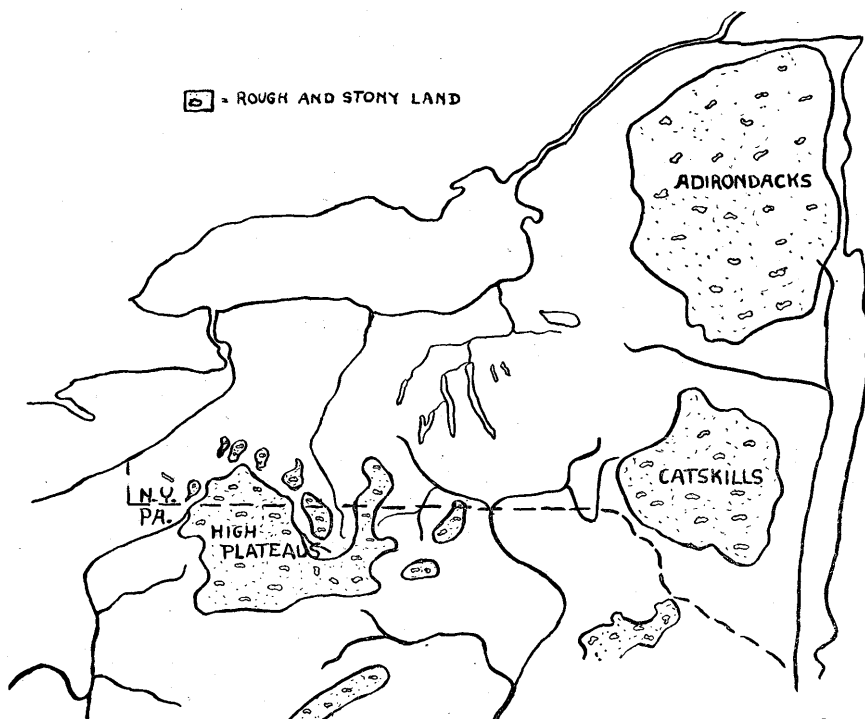




Map of High Plateaus

THE HIGH PLATEAUS OF WESTERN NEW YORK

STEPHEN W. EATON

The Adirondacks and Catskills are names well known to people of New York State but the High Plateaus of southwestern New York enjoy no such fame. This area is actually a higher portion of the more widely known and more extensive Allegheny Plateau. It is located in the southern half of Cattaraugus and parts of Chautauqua, Allegany and Steuben Counties in New York and McKean, Potter and Elk Counties in Pennsylvania. The top of this plateau averages about 2200 feet with a maximum elevation of 2648 feet which occurs south of our borders in Pennsylvania (see map).

The growing season is approximately 130 days or a month less than the Ontario Lake Plain and is quite similar in this respect to the lower elevations of the Adirondacks and Catskills. Seldom does one see a show of *Forsythia* and Redbud in the residential areas of Olean nor do we hear the Kattydids (and didn'ts) nor the Tree Toads so characteristic along the shores of the Finger Lakes and Lake Ontario. Over a period of twenty years frosts have been recorded in the valleys every month of the year. The maple-beech-birch-hemlock forests are characteristic of the shaded slopes and wet places and in dry sunny places oaks predominate. Mountain Laurel and Mt. Holly are two interesting plants found commonly in the sandy, unglaciated soils of the higher hill tops.

The north branch of the Susquehanna River and its tributaries to the east separate the High Plateaus from the Catskills. This river has had a complex geologic history (H. L. Fairchild, *The Susquehanna River in N. Y. and Evolution of western N. Y. Drainage*, N. Y. State Mus. Bull. 256-1925). Hundreds of millions of years ago the river flowed south from the highlands of central New York into an inland sea lying over much of Pennsylvania. Then by subsequent stream capture the old Susquehanna began to flow northward through Binghamton, Owego and the Seneca Valley into an Ontarian River. With the coming of the glacier, ice and gravel, filling in the old outlet to the north, reversed the flow again to the south. This ancient Susquehanna River, then, has robbed us (with the help of the glacier) of much of our Allegheny Plateau creating a *Susquehanna River-Finger Lakes Corridor*.

The west branch of the Susquehanna has isolated to a lesser degree the High Plateaus from the Allegheny Mountains of west central Pennsylvania. To the north the Genesee and Allegheny Rivers have cut large valleys into the Plateau and these have been further widened along its northern fringe by glaciation. To the west the Allegheny River and the glacier have further scoured the area on that quarter.

Starting from the highest point of the High Plateaus one could by a short portage canoe his way either to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, Chesapeake Bay or the Gulf of Mexico.

This area — like the Adirondacks and Catskills — is still mainly covered by forest. Today this is true because profitable agriculture is very difficult due in part to poor soils, short growing seasons and steep slopes.

How does this area of high plateau effect the distribution of birds? First it appears that many birds avoid the area on migration. Redwings are seldom seen passing over in the great numbers seen in the Finger Lakes country to the east nor in the same numbers as to the west of the area at Pymatuning. Though we see most species seen in other sections of western New York it is

in numbers of individuals that differences are most striking. During the past five years daily counts of 100 individuals (or more) of one species have been made on only 20 species. These are Whistling Swan 111, Canada Goose 100, Baldpate 130, Redhead 100, Killdeer 117, Chimney Swift 200, Tree Swallow 100, Bank Swallow 200, Cliff Swallow 100, Crow 200, Black-capped Chickadee 100, Robin 200, Starling 3000, English Sparrow 390, Redwing 1000, Grackle 200, Cowbird 100, Goldfinch 300, Junco 300, White-throated Sparrow 100.

In a more subjective vein it appears as though Red-breasted Nuthatches, Winter Wrens, Kinglets, Goldfinches, Pine Siskins, Red Crossbills, Evening Grosbeaks, White-throated Sparrows and Fox Sparrows are more common on migration on the High Plateaus than in the Finger Lakes Region. These species also appear to remain for longer periods in the fall and spring.

When wild black cherries and beechnuts produce good fruit crops, Flickers, Cedar Waxwings, Robins and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks appear in good numbers during October.

In winter few species remain in the area. The past five Christmas Censuses have yielded 24, 28, 19, 22 and 25 species. Crows are common during the breeding season but vanish in late October and return about February 15 — our first bird harbinger of spring. Only male Sparrow Hawks and male Kingfishers have been observed here in winter. Many finches appear when the proper fruits are available. Goldfinches, Pine Siskins, Red and White-winged Crossbills and Purple Finches spend the winter when yellow birch and hemlock produce good seed crops. Evening Grosbeaks winter in the residential areas when Box Elder and other introduced fruits are available. If the beech or white ash fruit crop is good this species also may be found in flocks in the wooded country.

The breeding species are extremely interesting because of their great variety. The northern element is well represented by such species as the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Olive-backed Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo, Mourning, Magnolia and Blackburnian Warblers and Junco. All these species nest in fair numbers in their particular habitats. Other interesting northern species are suspected of breeding in the Pennsylvania portion of the High Plateaus. These are the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Red-breasted Nuthatch. The Winter Wren and Whip-poor-will are occasionally seen during the nesting season in the New York portion but to my knowledge no actual nests have been found. The Goshawk and Raven nest in the Pennsylvania portion but have yet to be found nesting in this portion of New York State. It seems strange that with this strong northern element of birds the White-throated Sparrow is missing. Many have looked for it nesting here without success.

Another group of nesters are species characteristic of large, uninterrupted tracts of timber. In this category are Great Blue Heron, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Broadwinged Hawk, Turkey, Barred Owl, Whip-poor-will, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay and Hooded Warbler. These species, except for the Turkey, do occur in isolated stations on the Ontario Lake Plain and across the Finger Lakes-Susquehanna Corridor but are usually found in small numbers. Here on the High Plateaus they are characteristic species over a wide area.

Southern species are slow to invade the area. Though we now have a fairly constant Cardinal population in the valleys the Carolina Wren, Tufted

The Program Committee, under the chairmanship of Al Fudge and with the help of Cecil Ryan and his local committee, functioned admirably and made our annual meeting at Elmira a most successful and memorable occasion.

The Constitution and By-Laws Committee members, under Sam Madison's able leadership, will soon complete their work in arranging for incorporating the Federation under New York State Laws. They will also submit the proposed changes in our Constitution and By-Laws to implement the incorporation and to make other changes previously voted at our council meetings. Regarding the suggestion to shorten the name of our organization, the consensus of opinion so far received is to allow the present name to stand, as it well describes its entity.

For over two years we have had the benefit of the services of Stephen W. Eaton as Editor of *The Kingbird*, and I especially commend him for his excellent handling of this important and time-consuming job, and regret that he cannot continue beyond this present issue. His successor has been the concern of Fred T. Hall, chairman of the Publications and Research Committee, and we are pleased to announce that Mr. Gerald Rising of Rochester has been selected as the new Editor, commencing with the May issue.

In my last message I mentioned that the first questionnaire from the State Book Committee was expected to be mailed soon, but this mailing has been delayed in order to discuss it further at a committee meeting in Syracuse on December 3, when the final draft was approved. Robert Arbib, Jr., has done an outstanding job as chairman of this important committee, which will possibly soon complete its work in organizing, and in making rules and suggestions to be followed in the publication. All of the members of this committee, and its sub-committees, have given much time and effort to further the work on the State Book, and especially Allen Benton, chairman of the sub-committee on Bibliography, and William L. Webb, chairman of the sub-committee on Ecology, who have given so freely of their time and talents.

I wish also to thank, in the name of all Federation members, our Regional Editors for their painstaking and selfless efforts in providing us with such interesting information from all regions in our Empire State.

May I take this occasion to wish for the incoming officers the same fine cooperation which I have received during the past two years, and a most successful administration.

THE STATE BOOK QUESTIONNAIRE

As members of the Federation are well aware, one of the major reasons for the formation of the Federation, and one of the most important projects that it will ever undertake, is the publication of a new *Birds of New York State*. This project, which has been universally approved as desirable and necessary, has been under discussion and consideration almost since the inception of the Federation.

For the past three or four years a committee, representing all parts of the state, has been hard at work planning this book. Many different problems have been discussed and resolved: the division of the state in recording areas, standards and criteria, content of species write-ups, introductory chapters, editorial organization, and a host of other questions from ecology to illustrations.

The progress of the work has now reached an important stage, at which

Titmouse, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher and Worm-eating Warblers have yet to establish themselves.

Recently (at least since 1949) Turkeys have entered New York State from populations in the wild parts of McKean and Potter Counties, Pennsylvania. The New York State Conservation Department is augmenting this influx with the liberation of about 150 birds a year. So far this project, begun in 1952, seems fairly successful with a few broods of young reported in 1953 and more in 1954. If illegal shooting can be controlled and if sufficient feeders can be maintained during severe winters this species should be successful on the High Plateaus.

Biology Department, St. Bonaventure University,
St. Bonaventure, N. Y.

INFORMATION WANTED ON PILEATED WOODPECKERS

I am in the process of working up several papers on the life history and ecology of the Pileated Woodpecker, based on the findings of my husband, the late Southgate Y. Hoyt, and my own recent investigations. In connection with this, I am most anxious for information from bird-students in New York State on changes in the status of this bird during the first half of the twentieth century. The Pileated is showing its ability to adapt to civilization to some extent, and has been reported as occurring within the boundaries of villages and cities in recent years. There have also been a few reports of Pileateds coming to feeders, for suet.

I will appreciate very much hearing from any readers who can give me details on the increase in numbers of Pileateds in any given area, changes in their behavior, their feeding habits, and any other interesting observations, particularly any accounts of their coming to feeding stations.

Sally F. Hoyt
"Aviana", Etna, N. Y.

YOUR PRESIDENT SAYS . . .

This message will be my last as your president, and I welcome the opportunity to thank my fellow officers, Guy Bartlett, Elizabeth Manning, Elizabeth Feldhusen, and Hi Clements for their help and suggestions, as well as for the many hours spent in performing Federation duties.

The same unselfish efforts have attended the work for our several committees functioning in our interests, and have eased my own executive duties materially.

The work of our Membership Committee, led by Audrey Wrede, has been largely responsible for the increase in individual members to over 300, of which seventeen are sustaining members, three are supporting members, and five are life members. Our individual members are the main source of our financial support, so necessary for the publication of *The Kingbird*, and for other activities.

How pleased I was to awake the morning of November 9 and to learn that Amendment 7 (for construction of Panther Mountain Dam) was overwhelmingly defeated. Our Conservation Committee, led by its energetic chairman, Stanley Grierson, was in the thick of this successful fight, and also in the now apparently successful effort to prevent the flooding of much of Dinosaur National Park by the construction of the Echo Park dam.