

the Black-backed horizontal on the upper side of a limb. The censusers raised their voices in an attempt to arouse the birds without flushing them, whereupon both woodpeckers awoke and immediately began to feed.

A male and a female were still present January 8 on the Comstock elms. On January 10 the two of these diseased elms most favored by the woodpeckers were taken down. After this, a female was seen once more on each of two of the cemetery elms frequented previously by Black-backed. The bird flushed almost immediately upon observation these last two times, the final observation being on January 24.

One is left to surmise to what extent the removal of the "favorite" trees or the concurrent severe cold followed by a two to three feet snowfall caused the disappearance in midwinter of these interesting woodpeckers. — Margaret Rusk, 114 Standard Street, Syracuse 10.

Evening Flights of Migrating Waterbirds on Long Island: The intriguing study of waterbird migration is occasionally depicted at such coastal jumping-off places as Jones Beach, where some forty to fifty miles of ocean separate the southwestern-bound travellers' journey from Long Island to the middle New Jersey coast. Evening is often the jumping-off time. Usually by sundown the flock assembles or has assembled, and toward dusk the birds are on their way.

Three such flocks were observed by this writer, two in the fall of 1960 and a previous departure some years ago which seems worthy of mention. The latter, my first introduction to dusk migration, came rather unexpectedly. It was in the fall, around 1930, and I had trespassed on the south shore of the Jones Beach Sanctuary Pond, then a private shooting preserve of the Guggenheim family. Breaking through the Phragmites, I startled a flock of clamorous Canada Geese which brought swift verbal chastisement from caretaker Carman from Baldwin. After I identified myself as a bird student, however, he offered me a "front row seat" on top of the roof of the hunting lodge (now torn down) at the north edge of the pond, where he pointed skyward. For about five minutes I watched with intense interest some half dozen or more Great Blue Herons swinging in wide circles over the poison ivy and bayberry tracts north of the pond. Ever mounting upward, they, for all their huge size, appeared infinitesimal as they wheeled high over the water. Then, as if released by a single impulse, they cut an abrupt tangent to the circle and, together, flew into the southwest and out of sight over the ocean.

On October 12, 1960, again at dusk and again at Jones Beach, about 25 Black-crowned Night Herons flew over the ocean boulevard and out of sight over the ocean in a southerly direction. Their assembly preparations were not observed. However, they flew in a more compact flock and higher than usual when travelling locally. These birds flew straight out at right angles to the coast, as if intent on putting some miles of ocean under them before veering southwest to the distant New Jersey marshes.

The third flock of the three mentioned above consisted of some 30 Black Skimmers which assembled in Sloop Channel, east of the Meadowbrook causeway bridge and a half mile west of the fishing station at Jones Beach. They were first observed about sundown by Cornelius Ward of Roosevelt, my wife, and myself. The birds were assembled in customary feeding behavior as they skimmed over the surface of the water near a sandbar, their forms distinct against the bright western sky. Some fifteen minutes later as the brightness faded, they were seen flying over the sandbar, gathering in what appear to be an excited assemblage. The flock then veered upward, and in gyrations very similar to flocking sandpipers they zig-zagged and wheeled ever higher until they had gained an altitude of an estimated 400 feet. Then with strong rapid wing beats they headed straight southwest over the ocean, passing Jones Inlet on the way.

Although such departures are inclined to leave an empty feeling in the mind of the observer as one sees birds leave for the year, it is far better that they go on time while the migration urge is strong than to linger perhaps in some confused state until hopes of survival have almost disappeared. After the hurricane of

September, 1942, hundreds of Black Skimmers were found around our South Shore inlets, and a lingering flock of fifty to sixty stayed all fall. Some of these, in pathetic condition, were seen in snowy weather on the Jamaica Bay flats; the depleted flock was later observed skimming over the surface of the slips in New York harbor for such floating edibles as they might pick up. On the last day of that year the writer saw a long line of an estimated twenty to thirty slow-flying skimmers against the bright western sky as they passed down the Narrows. Through a 50-power telescope they were observed out in the middle, between Staten Island and Brooklyn, and seemingly headed for the New Jersey coast. These birds, low-flying and barely skimming over the surface of the water, appeared to be half-starved, weak, and thoroughly dejected. Evening again was the time of their departure, but by the calendar they were several months late. What a contrast to the properly timed, seasonal departure which produced the vivacious, high-flying Sloop Channel birds! — John J. Elliott, 3994 Park Avenue, Seaford, Long Island.

Virginia Rails in Winter in Columbia County: During the early morning hours of January 22, 1961, the temperature fell to 26 degrees below zero, but by early afternoon it was nearly ten above, and the day was otherwise breezy, sunny, and beautiful. The Stony Kill, a small spring brook that runs through Canaan in eastern Columbia County, was, for the first time in years, completely frozen over where it passes through our field. The snow which had fallen on the windy night of January 19-20 showed no signs of settling.

It was under such weather conditions that I received a phone call from an excited neighbor about two "dark, long-billed birds" which he had seen further down the brook. My immediate reaction was "probably Starlings," but fortunately my neighbor was a determined man.

The birds had been seen at an area where the brook, fed by the comparatively warm water of springs, passes under a road and enters a marsh. The brook has never been known to freeze at this point. Upon our arrival there no birds were immediately in evidence, but when a boy with boots jumped from the bridge into the brook, he flushed out the two birds. They flew upstream for a few yards, then circled to return, alighting in the shallow water nearly under the bridge. The birds were Virginia Rails. One was noticeably the darker, and as it picked its way along the stream edge, a very light patch was apparent under its short wedge-shaped tail. The other was much browner, and it appeared slightly larger. The darker of the two birds was probably a young of the past season.

Although there is enough animal life in the Stony Kill to keep fat a fair-sized trout population during the winter, this was a period of bitter cold. Night time lows averaged —17, with minimums of —26 to —30 on three nights. Snow covered many of the small branch streams and most of the vegetation. It was felt that supplemental feeding should be tried. Shrimp and minced clams were dropped into the brook in both silted and gravelly spots where the birds had been seen probing the bottom. Both birds were subsequently seen picking around in these places, and we think they ate some of this seafood, most of which disappeared.

In the several days after January 22 many Alan Devoe Bird Club members came to view these birds. This was the initial result of a recently instituted "bird alert" telephone system.

The darker of the two rails appeared much tamer than the other, browner bird. When seen, the birds were active, walking quickly over patches of ice and snow or alternately wading and swimming in the open water of the brook, probing the bottom in shallow places or picking among the stones at the edge of the water. Rarely one or both flew short distances upstream or downstream, but never away from the brook. Occasionally they stood still for a few minutes in the running water, which was, of course, many degrees warmer than the air. Six or seven times they were seen to select a spot in bright sun, on the sheltered side of the bank, fluff their feathers out, and settle into the light, soft snow for periods of ten to fifteen minutes. Several times, when observers arrived at the bridge, the darker bird was seen to emerge from a rocky crevice at the brook's edge. This was a hole half the size of a man's head.