

THE RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER IN WESTERN NEW YORK

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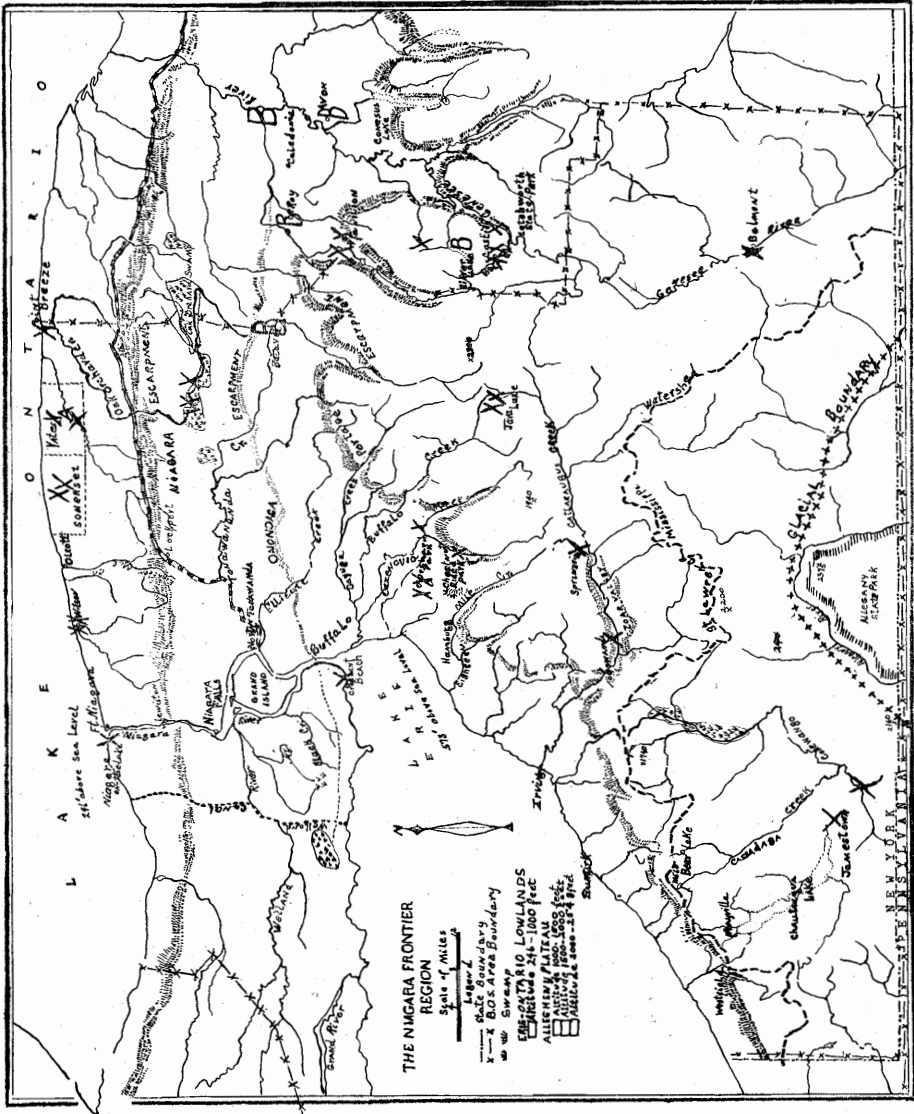
Considering the generally more southern range of the species as a whole, it is somewhat surprising that the Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Centurus carolinus*) occurs in New York State at all. According to the AOU checklist, the range is given as Southeastern Minnesota, Southern Wisconsin, Southern Michigan, extreme Southern Ontario, Western New York, and Delaware south to Southern Texas, the Gulf Coast, and Florida Keys to Key West. Local in distribution in the more northern areas. This last phrase certainly applies to the Western New York area. Four subspecies are recognized. One, *C.c. carolinus* is found north only to Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, and Southeastern Pennsylvania. *C.c. perplexus* is restricted to Florida, and *C.c. harpaeus* is found only in Texas. It is the other race, *C.c. zebra* which occurs here.

Except for the note that the species is local in distribution in the more northern areas, one might suspect that our populations are a general spreading out of the species northward from those portions of the range of the species in central and southern Ohio where the species is more common. There is, however, a distinct gap between the Ohio populations and those in New York State which cannot be accounted for by any recent northward range extension such as we have witnessed in such forms as the Cardinal, Titmouse, and Mockingbird in our time. The Red-bellied Woodpeckers in New York form a singularly isolated population of this species, centered more or less in the lower Genesee Valley and discontinuous with the rest of the species.

I cannot believe that the total number of these birds in our state is very large. There are a few, probably less than twenty, places where some of us might go with reasonable expectation of seeing a Red-bellied Woodpecker. Those that I know are all located in a rather narrow band stretching from the Batavia area on the west to around Montezuma on the east. I know that I am not sufficiently acquainted with the eastern edge of this range, so that probably many of you know of other localities farther east where the bird can be found, but I am rather well acquainted with the western part of this range. It is with regard to the western edge that I will generally concern myself in this paper.

To the west of the Genesee river valley area, the only known localities where this species breeds regularly, in so far as I have been able to discover are: certain spots near Batavia, several locations in the vicinity of LeRoy, possibly somewhat south of there in the township of Pavilion, and near the east side of Silver Lake. Each of these locations is marked B on the accompanying map. Notice, on the map, that each of these areas is generally rather close to the Genesee Valley. Even there, however, the species is not widespread and several apparently suitable woodlots seem to be unpopulated by the species. The bird *certainly* does not breed, at least regularly, in Letchworth State Park, at Castile, where Mrs. Mary Thompson reported the bird just twice in many years of active field explorations, nor in the more heavily covered areas nearer Buffalo.

Map showing occurrences of Red-bellied Woodpecker in Western New York



In some respects they occur just where one would expect them to. They are, in general, more frequent in the areas adjacent to the breeding area and become less frequent as the distance increases. Another factor, not indicated here, is that the chance of a wandering bird being detected tends to somewhat increase as one gets closer to Buffalo, at least in the areas shown here. Notice how the records seem to follow the watercourses. This, I am sure gives a clue to the movements for wandering individuals of the species.

It seems highly probable that most of the wanderers are young birds, perhaps supplemented somewhat by aged or deficient individuals unable to hold a territory in the more favorable environments nearer the center of the colony. These birds, once they are driven from or leave their former homes, tend to move in the easier channels and to settle wherever conditions permit their continued survival for a time.

The shore-line of Lake Ontario certainly makes an easy migration marker and the records tend to show it. Actually, there are few suitable habitats for Red-bellied Woodpeckers in the vicinity of Lake Ontario. If they manage to get west across the intervening hills, they tend to follow the streams toward Lake Erie and the Niagara. Notice how the records follow the creeks — Cazenovia, Eighteen-mile, and Cattaraugus. The two Canadian records are, as you can see, from the lake shores — one near either end of the Niagara River.

Notice the records from Frewsburg and Jamestown. These are the farthest away from the breeding sites and therefore indicates the longest documented emigration from the colony that I know of. There is, however, the possibility that these birds were wanderers from the Ohio rather than from our New York populations.

I have known Ornithologists to search for intriguing problems in natural populations dynamics in far corners of the world. It seems to me that here, with a single isolated population of this species living resident in New York State, are the natural conditions for a most ideal study of this nature. (Note: Since this paper was written, the species has been found in the summer, presumably breeding, in Yates Township, Orleans Co. at the location marked A on the accompanying map.)

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Errata:

In spite of constant editing, errors do occur in our publication. We sincerely regret the omission of the Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club in the list of clubs in Mrs. Stoner's article "Our Clubs — How Old" in the July issue. The 10th entry in the list should read Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club 5/4/49 instead of Elon Eaton Bird Club 3/26/13.

We also regret the incorrect spelling of Mr. E. J. Whelen's name in the same issue; p.142, l.14 and p.146, l.38.