

6. Is your club at present engaged in that most wanted item of New York State bird knowledge, the breeding bird census of tracts of uniform habitat in your area?

In the many areas of the state not currently being covered by organized clubs, but in some cases by informal groups or by individuals, some of whom are individual members of the Federation, efforts should be made to initiate similar lists and surveys, so that every part of the state will contribute information to the final compilation.

In other words, we have a project, we have an author, we all have a job to do, and the time has come to get things rolling.

Robert S. Arbib, Jr.

WHAT CONSTITUTES BREEDING?

JOHN L. BULL

One of the most important aspects of the future New York State Bird book is the proper evaluation of data for breeding species. Although it may appear to be elementary to discuss criteria for breeding at this time, there has been an alarming trend to treat certain peripheral species as probable, or as definite breeders, even though an element of doubt exists in such cases. For example, there are a number of species which are expanding their ranges into "new" territory as breeding birds from the south, north, and west. Other species, common enough as breeders within their long-established range, are reported to breed in some instances well outside this range. Still others definitely established as breeders *once* in a given locality, are automatically assumed to be breeding on subsequent occasions when, in fact, actual proof is lacking. Most unfortunately these alleged breeding "records" are published as gospel truth, thus misleading the reader, the compiler, and the investigator. In many instances breeding is implied but not proved.

It is not identification of the species that is in question, but rather the evidence for breeding. Certain criteria must be adhered to, if we are to document breeding records properly. The following are criteria acceptable and unacceptable for breeding purposes.

ACCEPTABLE—(breeding proved, whether successful or not is immaterial)

1. Nest under construction or newly completed
2. Nest with eggs
3. Nest with young (altricial species)
4. Downy young out of nest (precocial species)
5. Newly fledged young being fed by parents

UNACCEPTABLE—(breeding not proved)

1. Singing male on "territory" (unmated bird)
2. Adult with enlarged gonads
3. Summering nonbreeders

The unacceptable category most frequently used as "breeding evidence" is number 3 — summering nonbreeders. In southeastern New York (Kingbird regions 9 and 10), the area most familiar to the writer, many species of water birds and not a few land birds remain through the summer, or spend a portion of it, without actually breeding. This category is too often

misinterpreted as a "breeding record". The following species, reported as having bred or probably bred in southeastern New York within the last two years (1962-1963) and published in the *Kingbird* and elsewhere, merely summered, or were reported on what was believed to be "unusually" early or late dates. These species most definitely were *not* proved to breed: Common Loon, (Orange Co.), Louisiana Heron, (Long Island), Red-bellied Woodpecker, (Putnam Co.), Olive-sided Flycatcher, (Westchester Co.), Red-breasted Nuthatch, (Westchester Co.), Cerulean Warbler, (Long Island), and Slate-colored Junco, (Westchester Co.). Note that all of these are peripheral nesting species in southeastern New York. Careful records should be kept for these and other species. Actual breeding must be proved, not implied.

In sum — it is of vital importance that breeding be proved. The presence of any species outside its usual breeding range in summer is not per se evidence of breeding, and is too often misinterpreted as such. It is the responsibility of the observer to report the actual facts, and not to assume breeding unless actually proved in the form of the criteria set forth. It is the duty of the regional compiler to ascertain the true and complete facts and to question dubious reports. Speculation as to probable or even possible breeding may be misleading to the reader and often leads to serious errors in print which become perpetuated. The evidence for breeding is directly proportionate to the rarity of a species — the rarer a bird, the more evidence required.

Finally, if the new State Bird Book is to present an accurate picture of breeding distribution and faunal changes, then a rigid policy of acceptance must be maintained.

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