

PRESENT STATUS OF THE NEW YORK STATE BIRD BOOK

JOHN BULL

Work on an up-to-date *Birds of New York State*, started in January 1966, was made possible through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Dan Caulkins. Research and writing are expected to take at least four years. Natural History Press of the American Museum of Natural History will be the publisher.

It is hoped that the member clubs of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, as well as the individual members themselves, will cooperate in supplying records and other pertinent information as needed. Present plans call for a number of color plates, perhaps as many as twenty or more, to be done by representative New York State artists. These color plates will not be the stereotyped bird portraits found in many state bird books, but rather will show various habitats with their characteristic breeding species. The illustrations, for example, would include a Long Island salt marsh and sea beach, an Adirondack Mountain spruce forest, and a portion of the Montezuma Marshes, each with its typical bird life. As to black and white illustrations, pictures of nesting birds, the various ecological associations of the state, prime birding areas, etc., will be needed. Each person who photographs is earnestly requested to submit illustrative material to me for reproduction in the book. It goes without saying that every photograph used will be duly credited. Also planned are distributional maps of the breeding species and some of the more notable migration routes or flyways.

The breeding birds will be emphasized, as they are badly neglected. On the other hand, information concerning the migrants and wintering birds is more easily obtained. The literature is full of data on the various aspects of migration, with a multitude of records published each year.

With emphasis placed on the breeding birds, there is much information that is required. A most important project deserving our fullest cooperation is the nest record-card program, which has been publicized repeatedly in the major ornithological journals for the past few years. These cards should be returned to the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University with all available data. Very important information is being gathered on this project. With each observer reporting the nests found on the cards, much useful data will be made available for the species accounts in the state book. I cannot overestimate the importance of this essential project.

Badly needed is a survey of certain species of hawks that are declining in numbers, or have even disappeared. The Peregrine Falcon is no longer a nesting species in the Empire State and has virtually become absent as a breeder over much of the northeast. The Bald Eagle has declined

from about a dozen breeding pairs in New York in the 1940's to *none* in the early 1950's. Ospreys have dwindled drastically, too, although not as dramatically as the two preceding species. The Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and even the Red-shouldered Hawk have been seriously reduced in numbers. Human disturbance, habitat destruction, pesticides, and other factors, have been instrumental in their decline.

A statewide survey of heronries is already underway. Black-crowned Night Herons have decreased considerably in recent years, as reflected in not only fewer breeding colonies than formerly, but also a diminution in size of long-established colonies. However, other species such as Snowy Egret are steadily increasing as breeders along the coastal areas.

The breeding ducks of today compared with Eaton's time should be amply demonstrated, as several species of western derivation are now nesting in New York State, where they were formerly considered only as migrants or winter visitors.

The documentation of certain "key" species is of prime importance as these birds are in a continual state of flux. For instance the introduced House Finch is rapidly expanding its eastern range. The Cattle Egret will bear watching as a possible nesting species in New York. It has bred recently in nearby southern Ontario and in Rhode Island. A number of essentially southern species have been spreading northward and continue to do so. Notable among these are Cardinal, Mockingbird, Tufted Titmouse, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and several others.

Another problem is to determine the extent of range, or southernmost breeding limits of certain "boreal" birds, or those having northern affinities. The Gray-cheeked Thrush, for example, ranges no further south than the Catskill Mountains, and is probably confined to the very highest summits, such as those with elevations of over 4000 feet, viz. Slide Mountain or perhaps Mount Hunter. A general survey of the Catskill region, if it has not already been done, may determine this, as well as the present status of a number of other so-called Canadian forms.

Of great significance is the exact breeding distribution of the rare and more local species. For example, consider the Loggerhead Shrike. When Eaton wrote of this species in 1914, he stated that it was a fairly common breeder in western and central New York. Is this true today? It is, therefore, essential that its present distribution, as well as its habitat preference(s) be ascertained. It is known that the Loggerhead Shrike, at least in the northeast, favors trees and shrubs having a thorny growth, such as the various species of *Crataegus* or hawthorns. Possibly it can be shown that the prevalence of this vegetative type influences the breeding distribution of this species. This is why, as previously mentioned, the important nest record cards should indicate where shrikes prefer to nest.

With Bob Arbib's writeup of the Common Loon in the *Kingbird* nearly three years ago as a starter, we have a long way to go before the more than 200 nesting species can be treated in similar fashion.

If all regional compilers will publish in the *Kingbird* precise information of our nesting birds, we can then plot fairly accurate range extensions or withdrawals, if any, for each one of these birds. We do not want indefinite data, such as the bird is "still rare", or that it is "becoming common", or that it is "spreading". We desire *actual* breeding occurrences in new areas as soon as they take place. In this way we can then ascertain the rate of time and extent as each species appears in "new" localities.

If the above information is not published in one of the state journals, it is imperative that important breeding information be submitted to me at the address below. In this way the data will be used in the state book as part of the breeding record. After all, it is everyone's state bird book.

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NOTE: This paper was delivered before the Federation meeting at Lido Beach, Long Island on May 21, 1966.

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