

775, Dec 26, (CSCC). Chipping Sparrow: Jan 13, Mattituck (AD); Feb 22–Mar 30, Bayard Cutting Arboretum (T. Lauro, D. Ford)—banded and retrapped at feeder. White-crowned Sparrow: imm, Mar 30–Apr 7, Speonk (LW)—an early migrant or an overlooked winterer.

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BOOK REVIEW

RURAL HOURS. Susan Fennimore Cooper, with introduction by David Jones. 1968. Syracuse University Press. xxxvii + 337 pp. \$6.95.

The first edition of this collection of day-to-day notes on nature in the Cooperstown area of New York State, presented in journal form, was published in 1850. In 1887 Houghton, Mifflin published a "new and revised edition" of which this is a reprint.

Susan Cooper was apparently a keen observer interested in all aspects of nature. Most of the entries are concerned with weather, birds, trees, flowers and general landscape. However, she also included enough comment on the people to give a good picture of life in the Cooperstown area at that time, and of the effect of human activities on the landscape.

The many entries about birds seem to present a fairly complete picture of the bird life of Cooperstown, with notes on time of arrival, abundance and habits. One entry especially interested me (March 27, page 25):

"A flock of rusty blackbird about the village. . . . All kinds of blackbirds are rare here; they are said to have been very numerous indeed at the settlement of the country, but have very much diminished in numbers of late years. And yet, they are still very common in some of the older parts of the country. . . . The red-wing black-bird we have never seen in this county; it may possibly be found here, but certainly is not as common as elsewhere. Nor is the cow-bunting often seen with us."

She was a conservationist long before that word was in use. On pages 141–155 there is a long discussion of the forest around Cooperstown. Present-day bulldozer operators seem to be direct heirs to the habits she decried:

"The first colonists looked upon a tree as an enemy, and to judge by the appearances . . . something of the same spirit prevails among their descendents at the present hour. . . . Mature trees, young saplings, and last year's seedlings, are all destroyed at one blow by the axe or by fire. . . . One would think that by this time, when the forest has fallen in all the valleys—with the hills becoming more bare every day . . . some forethought and care in this respect would be natural in people laying claim to common sense. . . . Thinning woods and not blasting them . . . preserving the wood on the hill-tops and rough hill-sides; encouraging a coppice on this or that knoll; permitting bushes and young trees to grow at will along the brooks and watercourses . . . how desirable would be the result."

References to information from other sources I found much less interesting than her own observations. Occasionally she lapses into long-winded digressions on her "pet peeves"—such as the use of scientific names for common names of some flowers and choice of place names in the United States. Once in a while the 1850 viewpoint is over-sentimental for these days.

The book afforded me pleasant browsing, picturing the small town of the mid-1850's as I read, and comparing her comments on the landscape with what might be written today. Capriciousness of upstate New York weather seems not to have changed a bit.

DWM