

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

TV tower kill at Elmira: The worst kill of migrating passerines in fourteen years occurred during the nights of September 19-23, 1977 at the WSYE television tower, Elmira, in Chemung Co. In 1963, the height of the tower was greatly increased to 843 feet above the top of Hawley Hill, which has an elevation of about 1725 feet. With clear weather or high clouds, the tower presents no hazard, but migrating birds flying under low clouds encounter the tower and its many guy wires.

Usually on rainy nights no birds are flying. September 18, with heavy rains, brought no birds. However, on the night of September 19, also with heavy rains, there was the enormous kill. It would appear that the migrating birds flew into the rainstorm from clearer skies. The low cloud cover continued the rest of the week, with intermittent periods of partial clearing, which no doubt accounted for the lower kills on the last three days.

The total of 1817 birds picked up on September 20 was followed by totals of 1358, 375, 132 and 180 on the following days. Prior to this year, the highest total for one night was 844, on September 21-22, 1974, and the total for that season, 1200 birds, also a high. In some years, depending on weather, the total kill has been as low as 100 or 200.

On the morning of September 20, Wilifred Howard called for help, saying she and Millie Wingert had been picking up dead birds for three hours in pouring rain. This was the worst kill ever. They brought the birds to our barn, in plastic bags, shopping bags and boxes. My husband put up tables, rigged up lights, and with two more volunteers, we went to work. Later in the afternoon, two more volunteers brought in several more bags of birds. We sorted, identified and saved the better specimens, putting them in "trays" (cut-down soft drink cartons). On the first day alone we threw away two bushel crates of badly damaged specimens. We phoned a number of colleges, but only two responded, and they took only a few trays. So, finally, all the rest were discarded, many of them beautiful specimens. The other persons helping were Helen Samson, Helen Knapp, Fran and Marge Converse, Dawn Klinko, Rosemary Connelly, Marge Johnston, Bill Ostrander and Peg Campbell.

Tower Kill, Elmira, N.Y. — September 20-24, 1977

No.	Species	Sept. 20	Sept. 21	Sept. 22	Sept. 23	Sept. 24	Total
1.	Bay-breasted Warbler	456	628	71	44	27	1226
2.	Tennessee Warbler	243	65	37	12	18	375
3.	Magnolia Warbler	93	174	29	10	20	326
4.	Ovenbird	188	64	22	12	25	311
5.	Swainson's Thrush	188	2	17	1	10	218
6.	Black-throated Green W.	58	108	16	5	13	200

No.	Species	Sept. 20	Sept. 21	Sept. 22	Sept. 23	Sept. 24	Total
7.	Red-eyed Vireo	86	37	13	7	3	145
8.	Wood Thrush	108	5	15	2	1	132
9.	Blackburnian Warbler	47	53	10	6	4	120
10.	Black-throated Blue W.	41	40		4	13	98
11.	Blackpoll Warbler	56	19	4	1	7	87
12.	Com. Yellowthroat	45	17		1	3	66
13.	Chestnut-sided Warbler	16	28	6	1	4	55
14.	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	39	3	5	4	1	52
15.	Black-and-white Warbler	20	18	4	3	5	50
16.	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	10	19	5	5	2	41
17.	Wilson's Warbler	8	22		3	2	35
18.	Nashville Warbler	11	12	2	2	5	32
19.	Northern Parula	10	7	2	1	4	24
20.	Canada Warbler	4	9	6		1	20
21.	American Redstart	10	2	1	3	3	19
22.	Scarlet Tanager	17		1	1		19
23.	Philadelphia Vireo	7	7	3		1	18
24.	Cape May Warbler	14	1		1		16
25.	Northern Waterthrush	6		1		4	11
26.	Gray Catbird	5	1	1	2		9
27.	Mourning Warbler	5	1	1		1	8
28.	Solitary Vireo	3			1		4
29.	Lincoln's Sparrow	4					4
30.	<i>Empidonax</i> sp.	2	1				3
31.	Orange-crowned Warbler	2	1				3
32.	E. Wood Pewee	2					2
33.	Gray-cheeked Thrush	2					2
34.	Black-billed Cuckoo	1					1
35.	Eastern Phoebe	1					1
36.	House Wren					1	1
37.	Long-billed Marsh Wren					1	1
38.	Veery			1			1
39.	Warbling Vireo	1					1
40.	Yellow Warbler	1					1
41.	Connecticut Warbler	1					1
42.	Yellow-breasted Chat					1	1
43.	Bobolink			1			1
44.	Dark-eyed Junco	1					1
	Unidentified	6	15	100	1		122
	Totals	1817	1358	375	132	180	3862

There were nine birds killed prior to, and three more following, the dates tabulated above. An immature Common Gallinule, killed on October 3, is noteworthy.

The above figures are far from being a true total count. From the tower, there are about 30 guy wires reaching across to various points over fields and wooded areas, so that birds striking these wires fall onto a large area. It was impossible even with the help we had to cover all tracts. That first morning the road leading up to the tower was covered with crushed birds. Below the tower on one side were two fields of very deep grass. Later in the week, it was mowed and a small flock of crows was seen there on different days feeding on the dead birds. Besides the dead, there are always a number of live injured birds, which, of course, do not survive.

If these figures are multiplied by the number of TV towers in the country, one wonders what the future holds. In former years there were large, or larger kill at lighthouses. Do TV towers outnumber lighthouses? Perhaps the solution lies in some electronic means of repelling the birds. Dorothy Crumb of Syracuse told me that the kills at the tower there had been greatly reduced since the installation of two telephone relay towers in the vicinity.

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The ability of a Saw-whet Owl to see by day: On the afternoon of 19 March 1978 several of us were observing a Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) well concealed in a tangled grapevine in an old pear orchard in Braddock Bay State Park, Parma, Monroe County. One birder was within five feet of the owl, immediately below it, taking pictures with a long lens, and the bird was leaning forward slightly, staring down at him. At least ten other people were scattered about between six and 30 feet away from the bird. While we watched, a Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) flew overhead at an estimated altitude of 300 to 400 feet. Instantly, the owl's eyes narrowed to slits and its head snapped back, its gaze following the hawk until it disappeared. This is particularly interesting in that in spite of the owl's being seemingly buried in the tangle and virtually invisible, it sighted the hawk and then considered it more of a threat than this group of people, one of them only a few feet away pointing a long lens at it. After the hawk had passed the owl's gaze was again focused, wide-eyed, on the photographer.

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