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The Passenger Pigeon

TO ENCOURAGE STUDY OF WISCONSIN BIRDS

Bulletin of the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology

Vol. III

July 1941

No. 7

OBSERVATIONS ON NESTING HABITS OF THE BLUEBIRD

BY J. B. KENDALL
Green Bay Bird Club

The Bluebirds upon arrival in Brown County, Wisconsin between the second and fourth weeks of March show little interest in bird houses and nesting. In a very short time they visit various nesting sites but are easily bluffed and driven off by English Sparrows and Starlings.

Along about the last of April and the first part of May the Bluebirds become more serious about their nesting problems. The male begins to feed his mate and the two start looking at houses. The choice of the house seems to be in a more or less open location not hedged in by shrubbery, trees or buildings. The male usually looks at the house first and if satisfied calls his mate to look it over. At this stage the Sparrows and Starlings are not able to discourage them quite so easily as they did earlier in the spring.

Nest building has been noted during the last week of April, but it can start any time later until the month of July. Observations recorded later in this article were made for the last few days of May 1937, on through the summer until autumn.

From May 15 to May 29, I had seen a pair of Bluebirds in the neighborhood looking at bird boxes. Sparrows, Starlings and Tree Swallows seemed to have taken quite definite possession of these houses and fought them off. Details on a nesting pair are recorded below.

May 29: At 6:30 A.M. I set out a roughly made Bluebird box on a 1¼ inch iron pipe with the 1 5/8 inch entrance hole 5 feet 6 inches from the ground. I set the house low, thinking that the Sparrows and Starlings might be too afraid to come that close to the ground. This low elevation was effective I found out later. By 6:50, just twenty minutes later, I had a Bluebird tenant looking at the house, and when apparently satisfied with it, he coaxed his mate to look it over. There was much going in and out before I had to leave for work.

May 30: The female bird was hastily carrying grasses and nesting material into the house. Although the male carried no nesting material he spent much time feeding his busy mate.

May 31 to June 6: There was not much nesting material carried. The male showed an exceedingly belligerent nature, picking on most any kind of birds. He also attempted to drive all birds away from my neighbor's bird houses.

June 6 to 13: Male bird continued to show fighting nature. Quite frequent feeding of female by the male both on and off the nest. If female was away too long, male would drive her back to nest. Incubation may have been started. Neither sex were unfriendly with Robins. A curious Flicker was driven from the house.

June 13 to 15: Female seldom out of house. Male feeding her much of the time.

June 16: First time both sexes carried food to nest. They would alternate at this for a few minutes and then the female would go in and remain on the nest a long time. Young apparently hatched or starting to do so. Food was of very small portions.

June 17: Both sexes ceased their vicious attacks on other birds except to defend themselves or their home. Male attacked me when I was setting up a remote control camera.

June 19: Put out some white grubs of May Beetle larva. Parent Bluebirds fought with Sparrows for the grubs and stuffed the young with them.

June 20: Adult birds did not go all the way into the house to feed the young. The young were strong enough to reach for food. Cutworms and slender green worms were at this time a very common food brought for the young.

June 21: First time voices of young could be heard. Cutworms and green worms were brought at the average rate of one every two minutes for quite a long period in the morning. Feeding seemed to cease at about 7:30 A.M. No observations after that time.

June 21 to 22: One of adults observed to be roosting on cross-arms of a neighbor's clothes pole about twenty feet from the bird house. Female carrying nesting material in neighbor's bird house preparing for second brood. Male would follow her on most of these excursions and make a big fuss over the work.

June 24: Young birds give voice to the same rolling call as adults except that it was weak, husky-throated and not so clear.

June 28: Young Bluebird with a well feathered head showed itself at the hole in the house. Resembled very greatly a young Robin.

June 30: Female carrying grasses into the newly occupied house. Male carrying food to the young. Some of the food consisted of beetles and other course insects.

July 1: Young not being fed so often. Female sits out on a shrub or post calling to young but does not feed them. Female again carrying nesting material into neighbor's bird house.

July 2: Young extend heads and necks far out of house and appear to be ready to leave.

July 4: One young bird left and flew like a veteran to an elm about a hundred feet away.

July 5: 5:30 A.M. Four more young left the nest. Adult flying in large circle and all young following. Has very much the appearance of a flying school.

July 15: The young were all gathering their own food. Independent of the adults. All five remained in neighborhood.

July 22: Neighbor reports he has brood of young Bluebirds from same adults. Two broods are the most ever seen raised.

August 12: Very cold day after a storm. Weather fair. Ground wet. A number of young Bluebirds in back yard on a sunny spot huddled together trying to keep warm.

Sept. 23: Quite a large number of Bluebirds in and around back yard. Some carrying nesting material into house. Others were playing and fighting.

Oct. 9: Warm balmy day. Twelve Bluebirds in back yard. One very busy carrying nesting material into house. Five others playing with a paper match folder. All seemed to emit a sharp alarm-chirp or chatter and fly wildly about pursuing one or more of their number.

There were other interesting observations made during the nesting periods of Bluebirds other years that will be described briefly here.

The most interesting of these was that of a Bluebird feathered and spotted like a young one of an early brood carrying food to a new late July brood.

Another interesting nesting incident was the refusal of the female to feed some young in the pin feather state. Only the male would feed them and the female would fly away and emit sharp alarm-chirps all the time. A friend seeing flies about the hole of the house suggested that I look into it. There were four live healthy birds and one dead one. After removal of the dead bird the female gradually forgot the situation and acted normal again. The wet soggy condition of the nest during a cold wet period may have been the cause of this.

During the period that the female Bluebird is incubating it was at times observed that the male would perch on a wire or post and sing.

This very soft almost inaudible sweet song consists of a series of warbles and repeated rolling, slurring notes similar to the variety given by our Catbirds and Brown Thrashers. I doubt if it could be heard at fifty feet. This was heard at or slightly after sun-rise and at or immediately after sun-down.

From the observations made during the 1937 nesting period of the Bluebirds, I would say that the incubating period in that case was about fifteen days.

JUNE FIELD NOTES

BY N. R. BARGER, EDITOR

(Kindly send field notes to N. R. Barger, 132 Lathrop St., Madison, Wisconsin, at the end of each month. Use A. O. U. order.)

Some interesting nesting reports were made during June. Naturally very little migration data was assembled for that month; but the breeding species afford us perhaps the greatest pleasure, since our paper is dedicated to the search of knowledge about Wisconsin birds.

A brood of Pied-billed Grebes under observation of the Prins Bros. hatched June 26, in Racine. Robbins and F. Jones report an immature Black-crowned Night Heron, June 13 in Dane County. Mathiak found four young American Bittern, June 15, near Babcock. Primaries were partially developed on the largest bird. Four fresh eggs of the Least Bittern were checked, June 21, in Oconto by Richter. An earlier nesting of this species near Racine, hatched June 25 (G. Prins). One Snow Goose lingered until June 1, in Green Bay (Kendall). A pair of Ruddy Ducks and two Baldpate also remained late. These were seen in Dane County, June 13 by F. Jones and Robbins. A nest of the American Merganser, containing four added eggs, was discovered on Chambers island, in Green Bay by Richter, June 29.

A Pair of Turkey Vultures appeared several times during June in Rusk County (Blue Hills) says Feeney, and he and Dahlberg saw another at Cedar Rapids, June 24, on the Flambeau River. Feeney found nests of seven species of hawks during June in this vicinity, including five of the Sparrow Hawk in Rusk County. The Prins Bros. have seen four nests of the latter near Racine this season. A brood of Cooper's Hawks hatched June 22, in Racine (Prins).

English Sparrows Colonize In Occupied Red-Tailed Hawk's Nest

Rupnow, of Ixonia, in an attempt to band Red-tail nestlings, was surprised to find three English Sparrow nests built in the underside of the hawk nest. All were occupied and a total of eight young were present. These nests were made of crack grass roots. The location was quite distant from buildings and the usual abode of the English Sparrow. The Red-tail nestlings had flown previous to June 8, but one was caught. Krawczyk reports a Pigeon Hawk, June 1, for Green Bay, but no nesting has come to our notice this year.

Pheasant Lays In Nest of Hungarian Partridge

Two eggs of the Ring-necked Pheasant were found in a nest of thirteen Hungarian Partridges, June 18, by Hannock and Kinzel. The partridge was flushed to dispel doubt as to the rightful owner. About a week later twelve partridges and one pheasant had hatched, leaving one infertile egg of each species.

Nest of Yellow Rail Found

Richter found a nest of this little-known species, June 1 in Oconto. The nest had but one egg, for it had been broken up previously. A nest of the Virginia Rail, in Waukesha County, contained seven eggs, June 8 (Jones). On the same day he located a nest of the Florida Gallinule, containing also seven eggs. On June 16 a nest of eight eggs of the latter species was about half incubated (Richter, Oconto). A nest of the Coot observed by Jones, in Waukesha, June 8, had just

been deserted by the brood.

Mrs. Rogers has seen Upland Plover in numbers near Appleton, this season. A nest of the Spotted Sandpiper, contained four eggs, June 5 (Tiffany). Two nests of this species, found June 14, by Richter, were fresh. On June 14, a nest of the Wilson Phalarope with four eggs, had been incubated about one week (Richter). By June 29 many young Herring Gulls were about Green Bay. Two Forester's Terns (Strehlow) and one Caspian Tern (Holterman) were seen near Green Bay in June. We could use some more information about the nesting of these two species. Nests of the Common Tern, with incubation well under way were found June 14, near Oconto, by Richter. Seven nests of the Black Tern, all with three eggs, were examined by Jones of Waukesha, June 8. A colony of nests of the same species, observed by Barger in Adams County, June 29 contained on an average of but two eggs. Mathiak reports a nest of the Mourning Dove, near Babcock, June 8, with two eggs. A nest of the Cuckoo (species?) containing two eggs, June 3, had four eggs twenty-four hours later (Mathiak).

Barn Owl Nest Discovered

Information gathered and observation of the nesting sight was made by the Prins Bros. Both adults had been shot in May by someone, leaving a nest of eggs ready to hatch. The boy who found the eggs tried to save two young birds, but without success. The nest had been built in an oak, partly dead, with the entrance about twenty feet above the ground. The cavity was about five feet to the bottom, where the eggs were laid. The tree stood very much in the open, but a short distance from the city. Certain identification was made of the species, when the female was brought to the Prins Bros.

Richter found incubation almost complete at a nest of the Night-hawk, June 9, in Oconto. The albino Flicker showed up again in Appleton in June (Mrs. Rogers). A Kingbird nest, found near Babcock by Mathiak, June 12, contained three eggs. G. Prins reports a nest of four eggs of the Alder Flycatcher, June 27, near Racine; and for June 6, Mathiak saw a nest of three eggs of the Least Flycatcher, near Babcock.

The Martins, nesting in Gatterdam's yard, have not raised any nestlings this season as far as he can determine. After the young Sparrow Hawks left the nest, he also noticed a falling off in numbers of the adult Martins. Question: Did the falcons have anything to do with the situation? It will be interesting to find the answer.

A brood of Blue Jays left the nest, June 18 (Jones). The nest was started May 6. While watching Crows chasing a Raven, Feeney observed that the Raven turned over completely in the air with feet up, when the Crow attacked. Mathiak noticed a brood of three White-breasted Nuthatches, June 24, able to fly. On June 16 a nest of Prairie Marsh Wrens was found with six eggs about half incubated (Richter). The Golden-crowned Kinglet was seen early in June and again on June 10 in Green Bay (Holterman). Four Nashville Warblers were observed near Green Bay, June 29 (Mrs. Hussong). A nest of the Yellow Warbler, found by Jones of Waukesha June 26, contained four eggs of the Cowbird and four of the Warbler. Three of the Warbler eggs hatched, being on top, but none of the others. The last young warbler left the nest, July 6. Warden Eric Moir, helping Gromme, located a nest of the Kentucky Warbler, in Grant County during June. Mrs. Hussong has seen two Connecticut Warblers at intervals in June near Green Bay. Pelzer, Deitrich and Dettman, helping Gromme, discovered a nest of this species in Burnett County during June. The Redstart appeared sparingly in the Green Bay region during June. Yellow-headed Blackbirds had laid two eggs by June 8 (Jones, Waukesha). One Orchard Oriole was found June 1 in Green Bay by Strehlow. Here is a species with rather irregular breeding habits in our state—very seldom we hear of it. A Brewer Blackbird nestling was identified in Dane County, June 13, by Robbins and F. Jones,—also a species of which we know very little in the state as a whole.

Nest of the Red Crossbill Found

The above mentioned museum staff also discovered a nest of the Red Crossbill in Burnett County during June. Perhaps details will come later. Several Leconte's Sparrows were identified by Mrs. Husson during June for the Green Bay area. Strehlow accounts for a few Clay-colored Sparrows observed in the same region during June. Both the latter species must be quite irregular in their nesting within our borders.

BUILDING A SOCIETY LIBRARY

During the past two and one-half years since The Wisconsin Society of Ornithology was organized, the editor has been saving ornithological literature and exchange periodicals as well as material on related subjects for a library for the Society. This dream has finally materialized to the point that within the next month about 100 pieces of literature from leaflets to books and also files of some 15 ornithological periodicals will be placed in the University of Wisconsin Library for safekeeping and use by members of the Society. This is the result of recent action of the Executive Committee in selecting this location for the Society library, and also the result of the considerate offer of the University of Wisconsin authorities.

Although detailed arrangements are still to be made, it is at present understood that all material placed in the University of Wisconsin library will be marked as the property of the Society and catalogued as well as bound when that is necessary or advisable. The material will be available for the use of students of the university and also will be mailed out on loan to anyone in the State interested in using any particular publication. The University will probably pay postage one way and the party making the loan will pay the return postage.

As the Society has many bird students throughout the State, and as it is seldom that small local libraries have any considerable amount of literature of this character, it is believed that the Society is here undertaking a very worthwhile program. However, in order to really make this library as valuable as is desired, a great amount of cooperation from members of the Society will be necessary as there are no funds available at present for furnishing this collection with various valuable books.

Here is where all members of the Society can be of service. Should you have an extra copy of any bird leaflet, booklet or book, or of any reprints of articles on ornithological or related subjects of botany, entomology, etc., contact the editor, advising him of whatever you have available. He will then advise you as to whether this material is already in the library and also give you shipping details if the publication you have can be used. Likewise, members are requested to remember this library in their wills so that valuable books and publications can be placed in a location where they will do the most good after the owner no longer has use for them.

It is hoped that the Society will be able to publish a catalogue of its books and publications in this library from time to time, listing also the donors who were responsible for placing that item in the library. In this manner those who assist in building up this library will receive some recognition, and a list of materials available through loan will be made available to all members.

The editor will look forward to hearing from various members who undoubtedly have some duplicate copies of ornithological literature on hand. At present almost anything can still be used as there are thousands of books and manuscripts still needed for the library. It is hoped that this Society library will later be used regularly by all members not possessing their own private libraries or living in a large city with a complete library available. It is also hoped that all members will take a personal interest in building up this Society library as they would their own private collection.

THE EDITOR IS CHAGRINED

BY W. E. SCOTT

Today I received my copy of the Sunday Milwaukee Journal (August 10) and as a dutiful conservationist and respectful admirer of Gordon MacQuarrie, I turned to his page for the Wisconsin "sportsman." And there, lo and behold, on the top of the page, with the most comical of cartoons, is the title: "The Great Blue Heron is Wisconsin's Most Consistent Game Law Violator." MacQuarrie, as previously Russ Pyre of the Wisconsin State Journal, had seen Charles Kirkpatrick's paper entitled "Some Foods of Young Great Blue Herons," published in November, 1940, in *The American Midland Naturalist*. They both chose to use his scientific findings to help antagonize Wisconsin hunters against these birds.

We are sure that Kirkpatrick did not mean his study to have this effect. He was simply trying to find out details on the production of fish from certain Vilas County lakes, and studied, in this case, fish-eating birds, instead of fish-eating people. We felt that Kirkpatrick tried to do a good job, and as he was with the University of Wisconsin at the time, we secured at some cost 400 reprints of his paper for all members of The Wisconsin Society of Ornithology. Our members like to see the Great Blue Heron as a general rule; they could read this paper for its scientific facts without condemning the bird. But the public, and their favorite commentators, seemingly cannot resist the opportunity to misinterpret scientific findings for their own ends. Kirkpatrick is now Assistant Professor of Wildlife Management at Purdue University. We feel that he does not favor the destruction of the Great Blue Heron as he is interested in all wildlife. We can only say that we are sorry we assisted in distributing his paper to people who could not properly interpret its meaning and limitations and even its possible faults.

What Are The Facts?

As far as Kirkpatrick's study is concerned, it seems advisable to call attention to the following facts which are always seemingly overlooked by those interested in seeing Great Blue Herons killed to save fish for fishermen:

1. Kirkpatrick's study was made in one of Wisconsin's **best** game fishing areas on two rookeries, and has no pertinent data that could indicate the species or value of fish taken by Herons in rookeries in southern Wisconsin or elsewhere.

2. The study lasted only for 40 days during the nesting season of the birds when great amounts of the most available foods were necessary and therefore has no authentic basis in relation to the food habits of the Great Blue Heron for an **entire year**.

3. Kirkpatrick stated that in order to secure food from the nestling Herons for study he forced them to "disgorge parts of their last meal" by making noise under the rookery. The young Herons could therefore be expected to be twice as hungry and it may even be suggested that the parents were required to bring in twice as much food. Kirkpatrick made no estimate of the amount of food needed per day by the young due to possibly this method of collecting the food for study, but it may be supposed that Moseley's Ohio study (1936), citing their food at two pounds per day, used this method and therefore was inaccurate.

4. Even in this excellent game fishing area where Kirkpatrick made his study, he found that "More than 50% of all food items were yellow perch." But neither MacQuarrie or Pyre mentioned this finding because it was better news copy to publicize legal sized bass and pike which were also eaten.

5. Kirkpatrick mentions the studies of Cottam (1936) and Chavin (1932) on the food of Great Blue Herons, but did not cite their findings in detail because they did not relate to his particular location of study or time of year. This was all right, but possibly more information about the findings of these two men on the food habits of these birds

throughout the year and throughout the country might well have been listed to offset these newspaper misinterpretations. Chapin found that fish were only 60% of the Great Blue Heron's food, while Cottam also found much less of fish than Kirkpatrick and also less game fish in general.

Another Bird For The Extinction List?

On the same page of the Milwaukee Journal previously listed there is an article citing ten species of birds dangerously close to extinction. What with propaganda of this type, we wonder whether fishermen and their commentators are so selfish that they would like to see the Great Blue Heron also on that list? Wisconsin ornithologists have reported the Great Blue Heron as becoming rarer each year. Is it true that there is no longer any place for them in our wildlife environment?

You might ask us why we are becoming dramatic. How are we to offset such writing as we find in MacQuarrie's "sportsman's" page? He says of the Great Blue Heron: "He carries no fishing license in his billfold. He belongs to no sportsman's league. He never bought a wildlife stamp." **These statements might well be made of the majority of Wisconsin fishermen as well as of the Great Blue Heron.** Moreover, we know that when the Heron takes a fish with its "javelin-like beak" it does not necessarily take all game fish of the best kinds as might be expected of a violator of the law. Likewise, drought and pollution are not respecters of species either, but kill annually many more fish in Wisconsin than the Herons.

We Are Not Supposed To Fight

At the formation of The Wisconsin Society of Ornithology the organizers had an understanding that the Society was not supposed to become a militant agency for or against any particular wildlife cause, but rather a scientific group. We have maintained this position until the editor has now broken the silence. Possibly we had better be silent, but without an organized group awake to the dangers of this type of propaganda, how are we ever to hope for better legislation in Wisconsin for the protection of Great Blue Herons and Kingfishers?

Recently the Wisconsin Conservation Congress again went on record as being opposed to protection of the Kingfisher anywhere in the State and the protection of the Great Blue Heron anywhere except within 1,000 feet of a rookery. Even the fact that the Great Blue Heron is protected by Federal laws would not change their attitude in that regard as far as State laws are concerned.

Failing to receive favorable consideration by the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Dr. B. L. von Jarchow, 1601 Washington avenue, Racine, is taking it upon himself to organize all interested individuals in the State in a campaign for the protection of these birds. All Wisconsin bird students are advised to contact Dr. von Jarchow assuring him of their support or the support of their bird groups.

NEWS NOTES AND BY THE WAYSIDE

S. Paul Jones, 509 West Avenue, North, Waukesha, is preparing a detailed Wisconsin study of the Holboell's Grebe and requests that anyone having records of this bird for Wisconsin contact him. He is especially interested in any nesting data, but is also anxious to receive sight observations.

Several valuable records which were overlooked in the month of May are cited as follows: George Prins saw a Turkey Vulture at Racine on May 7, and the Prins brothers another at Racine on May 31; Jones observed a Blue-winged Warbler at Waukesha on May 12. Also, on May 18, two Sandpipers were observed by members of the Waukesha Bird Club, Jones, Philip, Frank, Adams and Nelson, and after much research and study of skins at the museum, they concluded that the birds they saw must have been Western Sandpipers. This is an unusual Wisconsin record that would have been even more valuable if authenticated by a specimen.

Grange, Allen, Gastrow and Mathiak this past spring on Wisconsin's Grouse Research Project located 149 Prairie Chicken and Sharp-tailed Grouse booming grounds on 130,560 acres of land in Wood County, Central Wisconsin, or an average of one for every 876 acres. Their estimate of the population of cocks on this area was 959, and total birds, including hens, 1,744 or an average of one bird for every 75 acres. They consider this area one of the best "prairie grouse" locations in Wisconsin.

Buss, working with the assistance of Bussewitz and Kozlik on the Wisconsin Conservation Department's Pheasant Research Project, found that the most frequent hatching date for southern Wisconsin Pheasant nests this past season (of 141 nests) was from June 13 to June 19. The peak hatching time for second nestings on Pheasants was from July 16 to 21. Buss found the highest mortality of nesting Pheasants to be caused by haying operations.

This year again Warden Al Dunham of Oshkosh reported 10,000 Mallard ducks feeding in the barley fields near Rush Lake, Winnebago County, by the end of July. The concentration was made up of 30% Black Mallards according to Dunham.

The Wisconsin Conservation Commission at its meeting at Hudson, Wisconsin, on August 11, passed a regulation protecting all species and varieties of Hawks and Owls, except Great Horned Owls, in the State, with the further exception that the owner or occupant of any land may kill Hawks of any species or variety thereon when found doing damage.

This legislation, which now gives complete protection to the Snowy Owl previously unprotected, was supported by Wisconsin ornithologists as a better method of protecting Hawks, and this action is to be considered as a move in the right direction. Previously it was almost impossible to enforce the law protecting certain Hawks because hunters maintained they could not be expected to identify the various species. This new regulation actually protects all Hawks over large public areas in the State and also prevents killing by hunters not on their own property when doing the shooting.

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