

## Winter Bird Life in the Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania

BY WILLIAM L. BAILY

My three short experiences in the Poconos in winter hardly warrant more than a brief mention, but the observations that I made have a direct bearing upon the food-supply and the effect of deep snow on the life of the birds that may prove of interest. Although the cold in this region is usually intense, and the ground may be covered with deep snow for weeks at a time, the birds and mammals generally survive.

An old resident of the region, Warner by name, used to say that nature would provide for the birds no matter how hard the winter might be, and that when in the fall the buds were full and many, and the catkins on the birch and alder long and fat, it indicated a severe winter, and his neighbors were warned to stop up the cracks and fill their bins with wood.

As an example of the truth of the old man's saying, when I was there from February 18 to 24, 1905, the buds on the rhododendron and laurel were remarkably full, the catkins were long and fat, and the snow was from twenty-four to thirty inches on a level everywhere, while some of the drifts were fifteen feet high. It was impractical to cross the fields or enter the woods, and my walking for two and a half days was confined almost entirely to the roads opened by sleigh travel; hence the ground I covered was rather limited.

No snow had fallen for about ten days, and the snow and cold had combined to make a thin crust on the surface, not quite strong enough to bear one's weight, which made traveling across the country almost impossible. The weeds that furnish such ample food-supply for the Finch family were buried out of sight, and thus the birds had to feed upon the buds and cat-

kins of the higher shrubs and trees, or upon food especially provided by their kind-hearted human friends.

The Ruffed Grouse feeds, I am informed, on the apple buds, which are numerous in the Poconos, and upon birch catkins, aspen and ironwood, wild azalea, and sometimes sumac, and occasionally upon laurel leaves, but not on rhododendron or alder, and when there is no snow on the ground acorns and chestnuts form a large portion of their food.

In spite, however, of the native food-supply and the hardy character of the Grouse, they will venture close to the farm house and pick up with especial relish the buckwheat and other grain thrown out for them. They soon learn to know the favored spot, and will come day after day, early in the morning, where with so little effort they can get a full meal.

One of the most interesting features of the trip was the animal and bird tracks on the snow. Although we saw but one Ruffed Grouse, there were hundreds of their tracks, besides the tracks of smaller birds; rabbits, which crossed in every direction, squirrel tracks along fences, on trees and across the woods; common skunk, mink, and apparently the tracks of a wildcat. It was most interesting to note by the impressions whether an animal had been sitting, walking, running, or springing. A Grouse had spread its wings and tail, leaving a perfect impression on the snow when it sprang into the air, and the wildcat had been making express time, spreading sixteen feet at a leap through an open field and across the road. The rabbit tracks in one place practically covered the surface for a large area, as if there had been a regular convention or camp-meeting.

The unfortunate Quail during this remarkably cold and snowy winter were apparently the only birds that could not survive. Their food-supply was practically buried and during December and January they came fearlessly up to the farmhouse to be fed, and the farmer or his wife faithfully spread buckwheat, until during several severe storms early in February, shortly before my visit, they appeared no more. In the following spring many frozen birds were found, whole coveys in several instances being discovered huddled together under fences or tangled brush. I was told that one farmer picked up twenty-

eight. During the next spring and summer the voice of the Bobwhite was silent, and not a bird was left in the region.

The Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, especially the former, were very active, and four of them were flying back and forth among the top branches of the oaks, and uttering that shrill rattling note, well known in mating season.

The Snowflake was my greatest joy, three flocks of from five to fifteen being encountered; all near houses or on the road. The people are very fond of them, and the birds are regularly fed by the natives. One flock of a dozen were seen near the front porch of a house, eating buckwheat that had been thrown out to them; and they exercised themselves by flying, much as Bluebirds do, from the peak of the roof to the orchard trees close by, and down to the buckwheat on the ground.

The Juncos, though found in abundance on my other trips were almost absent, only three being seen. As they are accustomed to migrating they know better how to protect themselves than the Quail, and evidently had moved southward or to lower altitudes. A resident who had noticed their absence said he never before had known them to so completely desert the country at this season of the year. He had not seen one for several weeks.

The Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*) were abundant, happy as usual, and apparently in no way affected by the snow, and found an unfailing supply of insect life under branches and half-hidden in the crevices of the bark.

Four Song Sparrows in the low lands near the stream were seen, one or two at a time, silently and persistently holding the fort.

Horned Larks, a few in number, confined their feeding-ground to roads, walking along the sleigh-tracks and hopping in and out of the hoof-marks.

Crows, Blue Jays, a single Goldfinch, several White-breasted Nuthatches, and a Golden-crowned Kinglet were also observed, and in spite of nature's food-supply, it is apparent in these extreme winters that the birds depend at least to some extent upon the farmers for their existence. Besides the buckwheat for the Snowflakes, Quail and Grouse, the man with whom we stopped

hangs out on a tree near the house two or three meat bones, which are a perfect feast for Nuthatches, Downy Woodpeckers and Chickadees, and judging from the time they spent working at these bones, it seemed their entire food was thus obtained. At one time a Chickadee monopolized one bone, a Downy another, and a Nuthatch sat on the fence close by for half an hour waiting his turn. Every day the birds tugged at these bones, and the supply was kept up as long as the cold weather lasted. Many a farmer and his family, it was said, pay similar attention to the birds in winter.

On another visit to Mt. Pocono, November 26, 1903, there had been considerable cold weather, and on this day the thermometer was down to 6°, a stiff breeze blowing, and the ice on the lake six inches thick. But on a birch tree over an open pool, just below the falls, sat a Kingfisher, watching his chance for innocent trout. On the following March 25th, before the snow and ice had disappeared, there sat the Kingfisher on almost the same branch as though he had been there all winter.

On a tree close to the house, I watched at close range a Nuthatch pick up a chestnut from the ground, carry it a few feet up the trunk of a chestnut tree, deliberately jam it in behind a projecting piece of bark and then hammer away at it until he had opened it, when little by little he devoured the contents; if it became loose he would pick it up and give it another jam. Once when he dropped it, he walked all the way down the trunk out onto the ground and back up the tree to repeat the operation. All the while I was standing within a few feet of him.

On November 24 and 25, 1906, there was no snow on the ground, but there had been ten inches earlier in the month, and almost zero weather. It was cold and windy, and to my surprise a Ruby-crowned Kinglet hopped out on the edge of a hemlock but a few feet in front of me, showed me his crown, and sounded his double chat.

Blue Jays were most numerous, more than I ever saw before at Mt. Pocono, and they were seen eating chestnuts, cracking them and devouring them on the ground.

As I walked past Wiscasset Pool, a Barred Owl, the first I had seen since 1883, peered at me from a maple branch over-

hanging the water, no doubt watching for a fish, for fifteen minutes later on Minausin Lake, a half-mile further up stream, I saw another one on a limb overhanging the water. As I approached he quickly vacated, and in a few moments had, with the aid of the wind, disappeared away over the top of Deer Mountains, getting away as though he never intended to return. A couple of hours later, near the head of Spruce Run, a Great Horned Owl flew out over my head from one of the large hemlocks, which grow in this dark and beautiful glen. I had heard one of these birds in August last not far from the same spot.

American Crossbills, Purple Finches and Field Sparrows, and a great many Juncos were noted; but flocks of Pine Grosbeaks attracted my attention most of all, and my short experience with them alone, made the trip quite worth while. First a single bird flew over my head, singing as he disappeared in the wood. For the next hour or so I would hear them every few minutes uttering a little note much like the Purple Finch but not so loud. Occasionally they would sing, with a single loud whistle followed by a short warble of the quality of a Purple Finch. They flew very much like a Robin, and when I imitated the song, three in drab plumage at once flew down to a small leafless birch and sat within six feet of me right out in the open. For several minutes they looked me over, uttering their little "tut tut," as though quietly talking to one another; then, exactly as the Purple Finches do, after a rather vigorous "tutting," they took wing and joined their companions among the pitch-pines. We were told that the Pine Grosbeak is common in winter, but like the Crossbill is erratic, and some years altogether absent.

I also saw what I took to be a Goshawk and a Pigeon Hawk, the latter I have seen a number of times in the fall and summer in the same locality.

Since so few visits are made to this and similar mountain regions in winter, it is probable that there is much to be learned regarding the endurance of certain birds and their sources of food, as well the effect of deep snow and failure of food-supply upon migration. These notes are offered as a suggestion of what will repay investigation upon these lines.