



PHOTOS. BY THOS. H. JACKSON.

NEST AND NESTING SITE OF THE MOURNING WARBLER.

The Mourning Warbler in Warren Co., Pa.

BY THOMAS H. JACKSON

I have never met with the Mourning Warbler in my home county of Chester during its spring and fall migrations, although there are a few records of its having been taken here. It was with a good deal of pleasure then, that I found myself listening to the charming song of this bird among the mountains of Warren county, Pa., on the 30th of May last.

Mr. R. P. Sharples and myself reached Warren about 9 o'clock on the morning of that day, and in company with our friend, Mr. R. B. Simpson, started up the valley of Morrison's run, a clear mountain stream that empties into the Allegheny river east of the town. The trees and bushes were dripping from frequent showers, between which the sun occasionally shone with a sultry heat.

As we entered the ravine a song entirely new to me came from a clump of ferns and blackberry bushes. At first I took it to be the well-known melody of the Kentucky Warbler; the first three bars of its song were a reproduction of that bird's, but the latter part of its performance was the liquid melody of the House Wren's song. Mr. Simpson assured us that it was the Mourning Warbler. On this occasion we tried our best to get a good glimpse of the singer, but all we could see was an occasional shadow flitting near the ground, and if approached too nearly the song would cease, and possibly a glimpse of the bird would be had as he disappeared in another part of the thicket.

We found these birds in full song in nearly every favorable locality—with just such surroundings as the Maryland Yellowthroat would choose for its nesting-place—in thickets near the edge of woods, among briar-patches along the roadside, and among the nettles and weeds in the partly wooded bottoms

along the Allegheny river, and in many places they seemed to be equally abundant with the Yellowthroats. In a large clearing or "slashing" about three miles up Morrison's run we heard at least six different males singing, each in his own special territory. Many hours of systematic search failed to locate a nest here, although we must often have been very near to one, as the singing bird simply shifted around from one bush to another within a radius of a few rods.

Between times we found interest in watching a colony of Chimney Swifts flying in and out of the top of a huge hollow pine that had been broken off about forty feet from the ground. In this same clearing a noisy brood of Hairy Woodpeckers had left their nest, and were creeping around over the home tree. A Pileated Woodpecker was calling from the near-by timber. An Olive-sided Flycatcher was busy carrying twigs, broken from a dead hemlock near by, to a group of smaller hemlocks in the middle of the slashing. With a field-glass we could see her carefully arranging them in nest form on a lower, horizontal limb, and frequently uttering her peculiar call in answer to that of the male which perched on the top of a tall dead tree near by, making frequent excursions after insects.

The first nest of the Mourning Warbler that we located was on a bunch of ferns in an open space in the woods, close beside the stream. We saw and heard the birds there frequently, but it was not completed, and was possibly abandoned because of our frequent presence in the vicinity. Another nest with one egg was found on the edge of the cemetery in a clump of briars. It was placed very close to the ground, and though we watched for the bird each time we were near the nest, only at the last visit did we get a sight of her sufficient to make her identity sure. The nest still contained but a single egg, apparently well incubated.

About a mile below the town, and close beside the river, there is a grove of scattering trees covering perhaps six to eight acres of lowland that is subject to overflow at times. Over this entire tract there is a dense growth of nettles, briars, and a variety of rank weeds that covered the ground from two to three feet deep. Two pairs of Mourning Warblers were known to be located somewhere in this jungle, although on that morning,

June 5th, we did not hear their song once; we decided to give the ground a thorough search, and from eight to eleven o'clock worked hard to cover every possible hiding place where the nest might be concealed. Mosquitos, gnats and nettles did not add perceptibly to the pleasure of the search, but as one of our main objects in coming to Warren county was to see and hear the Mourning Warbler in its summer home, no trouble or discomfort was considered in accomplishing this end.

Across the river in the grass flats, ten or twelve pairs of Bobolinks were nesting in the clover, then about knee high, and the males were in constant song, and to me, accustomed to but a few days of their presence in the spring migration, their concert was a great treat.

As we were about to give up the search, Mr. Simpson walked round to the edge of the thicket where it merges into a grass field, and there at the very edge, among the tall weeds, he flushed a bird from the nest. She was off and out of sight too quickly to determine her identity, but as I was photographing the nest she gradually became bolder, and finally both birds came into plain view, proving beyond doubt the identity of our prize. It had the appearance of having originally been placed on the ground, but by the rapid growth of the weeds with which it was entangled had been raised about six inches. The outside of the nest was made of coarse weed-stalks and stems; so arranged that the nest was much broader one way than the other, the greatest width over all being nine inches, while its shortest diameter was but six inches. It was four inches in depth over all, while the cup was two and a quarter inches deep. The second layer was composed of dry oak leaves, and next came a substantial layer of grape-vine bark in strips, some of them a foot long and one-eighth to one-quarter inch in width. The inside lining was a thin layer surrounding the entire cup of the nest, and consisting of strong, hair-like filaments of a reddish color, not unlike in appearance the fruit stalks of the hair-moss, used by the Worm-eating Warbler for the same purpose, excepting that they are much longer and tougher than that material.

The eggs were four in number and measured .81 x .52, .80 x .55, .79 x .55 and .78 x .52 (in hundredths of an inch). The

ground color is pearl, three of them having obscure lilac markings wreathed about the greater end, with a few bolder spots of reddish-brown, the fourth egg being thickly spotted with the brown shade evenly over the entire surface, similar to the eggs of the White-breasted Nuthatch. All of the eggs are quite pointed.

In concluding these notes it would perhaps be of interest to speak of the general character of the bird life as we met with it in Warren county.

The country is such as would naturally attract a great variety of birds. The valley of the Allegheny, at an elevation above sea level of 1100 feet here, has large tracts of meadow lands that furnish a congenial home for Bobolinks, Prairie Horned Larks, Savannah Sparrows, Meadow Larks and other field-loving birds, while the damp, dark hemlock and pine forests in the mountains still found in this county in large and well-preserved tracts furnish a congenial home for the Winter Wren, Olive-sided, Hermit and Wilson's Thrushes and Solitary Vireos, while Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Parula Pine and Blackburnian Warblers were in evidence on every excursion we took into these woods. Occasionally the cry of the Pileated Woodpecker or his vigorous hammering on some dead tree in the depths of the woods proclaimed his presence.

Red-shouldered Hawks were much commoner there than the Redtails are in Chester county, and little parties of them were often seen soaring over the woods as though the parents were teaching the young the art of hunting.

Conspicuous by their absence were the Worm-eating, Black and White, Kentucky and Blue-winged Warblers, as well as the Yellow-breasted Chat, though many of our commoner species seemed less abundant here than in Chester county. It was a pleasure to meet our old winter friends the Juncos, and almost the first nest we found was one of these under the edge of a bank, close beside the path, placed exactly as we often find the nest of the Song Sparrow, with partridge-berry and ferns gracefully overhanging. Four handsome eggs were in the nest, and were apparently well incubated. The Turkey Vulture that is so common in Chester county the year round is there almost an

unknown bird, and Mr. Simpson I believe has the only one taken in Warren county.

In this connection I would like to add that Mr. Simpson's museum of birds, mammals and reptiles, collected and skilfully mounted by his own hands, and mostly from within a short distance of his home, forms one of the most complete and interesting local collections I have ever seen.

One is surprised and gratified to see so many species of birds here, only a little over a hundred miles north of the Delaware Valley zone, that do not occur in Chester county during the breeding season. And when one has spent a day in the mountains with Mr. Simpson he begins to realize how it is that he finds so many good things, and how he seems to know just when and where any given bird or animal may be looked for successfully. Just as ready to climb a hundred-foot pine as to scale a five-hundred-foot mountain, the fellow that follows his pace at the end of a week begins to wonder where he can find a new pair of legs.

During our week in Warren county, we listed seventy-two species of birds, forty-two of which we found nesting, and of the seventy-two, twenty-eight species do not nest in Chester county.