

## Cruising Through the New Jersey Pine Barrens\*

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The bird observer who has failed to make the acquaintance of the little rivers of South Jersey, has not only neglected an unusual opportunity for study, but has also foregone the pleasure of days and nights out of doors amid surroundings peculiarly idyllic.

To me, most interesting of all these watery thoroughfares is the Great Egg Harbor River. Flowing as it does from innumerable springs and winding its way by easy curves and reaches through mixed forests of pine and deciduous growth, or sweeping out along a boggy clearing, it affords one in his pursuits much diversity of experience.

Early in the month of May while under a spell of incipient bird fever, an agreement was reached with a fellow enthusiast to explore this alluring stream. Lacking definite instructions we consulted a map of the Geological Survey and selected Winslow Junction as a possible satisfactory starting-point. Preparations were readily made, and upon one of those rare days of early spring the expedition launched forth. A morning train carried us to our destination and left us with our boat and baggage at the station platform, keen for the venture but more or less perplexed as to the next move.

Winslow Station stands a good half mile from the village and is separated from it by pasture land and meadows. How circumscribed the life and thought of a community may be had never before been so forcibly impressed upon us. All our inquiry evoked little information as to how to reach the stream which we knew to be only a few miles distant. Finally some one suggested bearing on to "Inskeps." The direction seemed

\* A portion of this course has been made memorable by Henry Van Dyke's "Between the Lupine and Laurel." Cf. also CASSINIA, 1903, p. 74.

right but the name did not appear upon our map. However, we agreed to let the matter rest with this suggestion.

On our jaunt from station to town we found a bird life strikingly typical of the intervening country. From the open fields came the drowsy buzz of the Grasshopper Sparrow, while above innumerable Vultures, marvels of aviation, floated silently by on poised wing. Individual trees standing in the midst of plowed fields harbored hosts of chattering Grackles, while the growth along the roadside was noisy with frolicking Goldfinches. The village itself was not without attractions. Of almost Sabbath-day quietness it expressed a degree of comfort and contentment little realized in our more urban communities. Some of the homes boasted paint, but those which commanded the most attention were of the low rambling sort with whitewashed sides and shell-lined walks as confines to scant flowerbeds. An occasional martin box, doing business, was also noted.

At the general utility store all our supplies were procured and with repeated "Goodbyes" from the boys gathered about us we climbed aboard our "prairie steamer" and started along second stage of the journey. The drive through the woods the strongly emphasized the kind of country we were henceforth to reckon with. The sand of the road gleamed white in the noon-day sun. At the sides where the shallow soil of vegetable mould afforded nourishment, blossomed the lovely lady's-slipper, and in the more open patches large colonies of sky-blue lupines. From the oaks ahead the Crested Flycatcher challenged us with harsh call, while from the tops of the scragged pines came the monotonous "chippy" note of the Pine Warbler.

At length at a turn of the road we came upon a stream, and to our surprise were informed that Inskeps had been reached. There was nothing to indicate a settlement, past or present, and we wondered how the little clearing, with no distinctive geographical features, had earned for itself a name. For us, however, the site was well chosen. Here was to begin our journey amid prospects most pleasing. Only a short distance above, the river broke out into a broad meadow lined with rush and flag. In the shallow waters the bayonet tips of goldenclub glittered in the afternoon sun. Near here, in open woods, we arranged our first camp.

The day declines, and the Wood Thrush, latest of all evening songsters, pours out his soul in the sweetest of liquid notes. At length the woods are all but hushed and an indescribable sense of loneliness comes upon us. Every sound attracts attention. Even the earliest mosquito, possibly the ancestor of that later host which makes the spot unbearable in summer, hums his presence. All these minor interruptions, however, are lost when from a distant quarter of the woods the call of the Whip-poor-wills arise in ever-increasing volume until the sounding notes, at first a pleasure, now become a monotony—most assuredly not an influence conducive to sound slumber. Had invectives been well-directed missiles, the Whip-poor-will camp-meeting would have been routed ignominiously.

At daybreak the voices of twittering birds stirred us from our broken slumber. To hear the purling waters of the brook made us eager for the start. Launching our canoe, we hastily climb in and are off. What a day for pleasurable excitement and experience! Overhung with leaf and branch the stream is difficult to navigate. In these first reaches there are no banks, relatively speaking, no happy vistas of overarching trees to gaze along. Little isles of alder and the fragrant *Leucothoe* shrub stand out defiantly, in the midst of the crawling current. Everything is chaos. Veritable dams occur where fallen trees back up the offal of the stream. These must be brushed aside or else cut through. In the early day an old bridge was passed, as neglected and unused as the road which leads over it. As we penetrate these tangles the voice of the Yellowthroat is heard most frequently. Flying at times to a nearby branch, the little fellow scolds vehemently. We wonder if it is not with a measure of pride that he thus vaunts himself before us, conscious, perhaps, of the spring-freshened color of his plumage.

There is a marked advantage in observing bird life from a canoe. Everything is approached from a different viewpoint. Banks and borders are explored without fear of swishing leaf or snapping twig carrying an undetermined species beyond the line of ken. And so as we steal down upon the unsuspecting Chewink, instantly he stops his scratching in the brittle leaves, flies off with a loud alarm note only to return stealthily through the

underbrush to gain if possible a reason for this unseemly interruption.

From the uppermost leafage of the birches comes down the wiry, gentle song of the Black and white Creeper, and at a lower elevation, flitting from branch to branch in rare gymnastic fashion, Redstarts spend their hours in search of insects.

Altogether it was a day of close association with old friends ; not those of the home grounds and orchards but dwellers of the deep high woods and tangled creek borders, as fond of seclusion and freedom as we ourselves were beginning to feel.

At the confluence of the Penny Pot and the Great Egg Harbor River a marked change is to be observed. The banks spread farther apart. Firm and well-defined shores replace, to a large extent the low, boggy stretches of the upper stream. Along in the afternoon, at a point where the stream widened perceptibly and the water flowed deeply and quietly, we paused for our second camp. Encompassed as we were on all sides with dense forests of oak and pine, it was easy to fancy ourselves many more miles remote than was the case. At evening the pines cast a gloom across the dark waters of the river, and as night settled down with its inky shades there seemed little between that silent wilderness and the sky above—a sky radiant with twinkling stars.

Our next day's journey was along a comparatively open stream. Here we drifted idly with the current. At frequent intervals we could hear the muffled drumming of the Grouse. Once we came upon one unawares at a bend of the stream, only to share in the surprise. Frequently the character of vegetation changed perceptibly. About noon we came upon a great open marsh at the head-waters of Weymouth Pond. Already through its shallows a new growth of cool, green blades had pushed up. It seemed that we wound for miles along its thoroughfares. Here we first added the short-billed Marsh Wren to our rapidly increasing list of birds. We found him busily exploring a clump of last year's stalks, with tail perked up and singing with unusual exuberance. At our close approach he chattered a rebuke and lost himself among the tangled grasses. In the distance the billowy masses of deciduous growth bespoke the

presence of the village. As we approached the closer, our attention was attracted to the dead forest at the head of the pond. With the damming of the waters below thousands of trees had come to be sacrificed through inundation. To-day these stand as silent sentinels, branchless and with bleached boles. In holes along this stumpage the Tree Swallows are nesting, while associated with them in their erratic flights up and across the broad expanse are countless Barn and Bank Swallows.

We selected a camping-place well up the pond, since we had learned the fascination of seclusion. Afterward we paddled to the village to replenish our larder. Here, couched at one corner of the broad, tranquil pond we found a town virtually falling to pieces. Everything was in decay, even the provisions obtained from the sleepy storekeeper. These, too, showed the ravages of time.

Out of the heat and beauty of the day a night of bitter cold closed in. Even the Whip-poor-wills were silent. They, too, had nestled down. Next morning, hopeful for a good bird count, we made an early start from camp, paddled up the pond to list the swallows, observed the Sandpipers teetering along the shore, and explored the orchards and gardens of the village before the villagers were about. Here were found such open-country species as the Bluebird, Field and Chipping Sparrow. Here also was observed a gorgeous Oriole intent on his morning meal, stopping at times to sound his loud whistled melody. Later we carried our canoe around the dam and launched it in the swift current below. Where before the pines and huckleberries had been conspicuous, here the deciduous trees and the laurel held first rank. Here, too, in the lofty trees we first heard the migrant Chestnut-sided Warblers.

Jostled along by the swift current, no slight skill was necessary to keep the canoe within its course. Sour gum and birch spray overarched the stream, making it a veritable trellised waterway. Later "Dead River," a peculiarly landlocked bay, was passed, only to paddle out into the meadows of Lake Lenape, in character a counterpart of those of Weymouth Pond. The lake along its western boundaries is bordered with high wooded banks, affording nesting sites for Bank Swallows. At

its lower end stands a village. Here the Great Egg Harbor ends relationship with pine grove and leafy thickets. Here we make our last portage. Now the tide flows in, bearing with it the tang of the neighboring sea. The meadows in their turn have given place to salt marshes which stretch out for interminable distances. Many tidal creeks break through these to swell the volume of the river.

In the tall cord grass along the borders we hear the song of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Frequently a Fish-hawk is noted traversing the watery expanse in laborious flight. A glint of whiteness beneath him tells the story of a successful dash.

Realizing a strong wind astern, we improvised a sail of bagging, which lent considerable impulse to our going. Down into wind-swept hollows or along the wave's white crest we press through foam and spray. Thus, with aid of wind and tide, we cover the remaining miles of our course, and towards a favorable shore reluctantly turn in our little boat. Yet much remains for rest and thought, satisfying and illimitable. The picture of it all goes with us on our homeward journey.