Summer in the Poconos

BY CORNELIUS WEYGANDT

It may have been that it was because our arrival was almost two weeks earlier than it had been the previous year; it may have been because the solid fruit of the oxheart cherry was just reddening toward the sun; it may have been because the dry weather of the previous summer prevented the usual drowning out of innumerable fledglings;—but from some cause or other there were many more birds about our home in Buck Hill Falls when we arrived there on June 25, 1909, than there had been when we arrived there on July 6, 1908. This day of our arrival was the warmest day the summer had yet brought, almost the warmest it was to bring, but birds were about our cottage in great plenty, and in evidence through incessant song. Catbirds and Wrens and Robins were busy with broods, but unwontedly noisy for a late afternoon that was as hot and humid as midday. In the after supper time that on more propitious days would have been the cool of the evening Chewink and Oven-bird and Indigo Bunting sang nearby. After dark a Chipping Sparrow trilled time after time, the more often perhaps since he had had little to say earlier because of the heat. Before the Chipping Sparrow had done a Whip-poor-will began to call, coming nearer and nearer, until, when he took up his station on the woodshed roof, he was so close at hand you could here the cluck preliminary to each utterance of his cry. Next morning the Robin chorus was so loud it woke me even before there was red in the eastern sky. I lay abed until its first burst had ended, then hung out the eastern window to drink in what freshness the night had brought,—it had brought little alleviation of the heat. As I watched the glow creep into the eastern sky and then spread low over the Pike Country barrens a Catbird began to sing, sing as I had never heard a Catbird sing before, more wonderfully than even a Mockingbird I had listened to one moon-

light night fifteen years before, a night far more terrible in its heat than this had been, a night so hot that I think none of us in the Green Springs Valley, westward of Baltimore, slept at all from bedtime until sunrise. There was coolness in this Catbird's voice; his notes were cool flames, the eastern ruddiness transmuted into sound, cool flames that played up about the dooryard thicket as lovelily as Loki's fire-music in the *Rheingold*. I suppose it was the "morning redness" that brought Loki to my mind, and it was undoubtedly this that brought to me thoughts of Jacob Boehme. I wondered had any of the German immigrants to Pennsylvania, to whom Boehme was "a light in this world's darkness", thought of him on like mornings two hundred years ago, when they, too, were watching the "morning redness", perhaps with prayer on their lips and ecstasy in their hearts.

My Catbird sang long and when he did come to an end, what I thought a new song set me hunting its singer, who turned out to be, when I at length located him, a Baltimore Oriole. His song was individual, but it was not beautiful, the only unbeautiful Oriole song I ever heard among these hills. Bluebirds warbled about the house all day, and Barn Swallows again and again passed twittering, and the Solitary Vireo many times bubbled up his song from the patch of woods westward. Redeyes were as vociferous as could be, morning, noon and evening, and Cedarbirds and Tanagers, respectively quiet and talkative, came every few minutes to help the Robins and Chipping Sparrows strip the oxheart tree of its cherries. The day's end was memorable for the two Wood Thrushes that sang from the trees of the little place, their first visit here so far as I can remember.

As soon as I began to resume my old walks all the birds so familiar hereabouts were come upon again, in the very same places as in former years; for they are very local, as indeed are the rarer birds everywhere, in my experience. The very frequent hearing of Cuckoo voices was a feature of these walks, the cooing of both the Yellowbill and the more mellow-voiced Blackbill being very often heard. The Sloitary Vireos, too, had increased. I never heard their songs so often before, and each hearing of it increased my liking for its full and delightful war-

bling. There were more Redstarts, too, which, are singularly rare in this region. Woodcocks were the new bird of this summer, two families in swamps about a mile apart being frequently seen, though they were more resolute in refusing to be flushed until you were about to put your foot in the tussock where they were hiding, than even Woodcocks usually are. The varieties listed this summer totaled at sixty-nine.

Up to within four days of our leaving Buck Hill it had seemed that the summer was to pass without our having any notable experience with the birds. There had been the pleasant belief, gradually deepening until certainty was reached, that there were more Hermit Thrushes than there had been; there was the equal certainty that the Eave Swallows were greatly diminished, the barn that bore fifty-one nests in 1905 having but three in 1909; and there had been the little spectacle, interesting, and, to me, new, of seeing a Chipping Sparrow chase a female Cowbird on its every appearance one morning on our place, as, it is said, so many European birds chase the Cuckoo. But there had been nothing distinctive to the summer, only the old pleasures, deepening with each experiencing. There had been a joy in Robin song never known at home, for here many Robins sing as beautifully as Orchard Orioles. There had been eager drinkings-in of the ecstasies of the Solitary Vireo and marvelings at the swift drivings of Doves over the high barrens. There had been many things good ornithologically other than these, but no bird hitherto unmet recorded, no new song heard, no new habit of old friends discovered, save perhaps the Chipping Sparrow's behavior with the Cowbird. Nor was there to be any experience startlingly new, but there was on Wednesday, August 4, an afternoon's visit to a Cardinal swamp that brought me face to face with a miniature warbler migration.

It was about quarter after four that I came out of the darkness of the rhododendron-thicketed tall swamp into the open where the old-field white birches shivered in a light stir of wind. I heard twitters and calls as I came into the strong sunlight. For a week and more song had almost ceased. This afternoon I had heard as yet but a Song Sparrow sing, and in several days before only the Hermit Thrush and Chipping Sparrow and Tan-

ager and Redeye and Yellowbird, with broken notes from Indigo Buntings and Robins and Wrens. The warblers had been all but silent, and when you came upon one who had something to say his song was broken, as much as you could expect being a lisp from a Magnolia, a shattered trill from a Canadian or the faintest nasality from a Black-throated Blue. Not only had they been as a rule silent, but I had come upon only one or two a day. Here in the Cardinal swamp I was at once aware of many, from dartings between birch and wild-apple, and from broken bits of song and twitters on all sides. There must have been a hundred birds about, more than I had seen in any one day for a month, save where swallows were gathered on the wires preparing for their southward movement. The Black and White Creepers were most in evidence. There were young and old of them, some in half song, and all twittering and scolding. The next bird I identified was a young Chestnut-sided Warbler, rather unlike his brilliantly arrayed father of June; the next was another Chestnut-sided Warbler, and the next and the next. Then I saw Redstarts, flirting out their fantails as usual when on the move. There must have been a family of them at least, all in subdued colors. Then I came upon a Nashville Warbler, a rare bird about here, and previously come across only in the September migration. There were several of these natty fellows, bright yellow below and dark ashy and olive-green on their backs, and with prominent eye-ring of white. They moved about more slowly than most warblers, with something of the deliberation of the Redeye, who soon nosed in among them.

With the warblers was a family of Chickadees, the father, moth-eaten from his moult, still phoebeing as he secured provender for his family. More active than any of these busy little fellows, warbler or Titmouse, were the Hummingbirds, busy as bees about the many cardinal spikes in the dry wallows. A Song Sparrow, songless, fluttered about among the meadow-sweet, and a great clumsy Flicker stumbled over his feet under the tall huckleberry bushes, making as much noise as if he were a magnified Chewink. This completed the list of birds within the swamp, but from the wild-apple thicket that wedged into the tall gums and poplars and oaks of its environs a

Hermit Thrush gently swept the silver strings of his high-pitched harp. I came upon him as I started out to the road and I followed him as he flew from tree to tree, resting on a dead limb every twenty paces, to tilt gently his tail and to touch again those silver-ringing strings.

Again before I left I was to come on another gathering of warblers. A little before seven o'clock on the morning of August 6 I went down into the glen of the Buck Hill stream. I followed the drive down to where rhododendron thicket and open woods meet within hearing of the falling water. I had sat here only a few minutes when I heard chickadees, which proved to be the heralds of a little warbler host. In another few minutes they were all about me, playing their various roles of flycatcher, creeper, vireo,—all of whose ways are in the repertoire of the warblers. First I identified a Magnolia ; then the little fellows, with two yellow wingbars, green back and gray breast, I took to be young Chestnut-sided Warblers. Among these was another fellow, similar save he had but one white wingbar and was yellower beneath. Canadian Warblers were very numerous and one soon sang his full song from a laurel not ten feet from me. Redstarts in dull plumage flirted by higher up in the trees and a Black-throated Blue sent out his full complement of nasal notes. Black and White Creepers were present, too, and, gradually, increased to profusion. They sang, tszitted, and worked over everything from ground to tree tops. There was no cessation of the song of the Black and White Creepers and Canadian Warblers, and every once in awhile a Redstart would sing. The Blackthroat was least noisy of them all.

What was this movement? There were fully two hundred birds in all in it,—I counted over a hundred as they crossed the road southward and I noted as I counted that very few re-crossed again northward. This is a far greater number than you would see here, at least together, in June or July. Was it an assembly for migration? Against this theory is the fact that in previous years I had found Blackthroats and Black and White Creepers here in September. Perhaps it was the late summer flocking that precedes migration with most birds.

Perhaps some would be off before the morrow, the Magnolias and Canadians and Redstarts most likely. The night before I had heard in the clear starlight before the moon rose many warbler notes from low-passing southing birds.

It must have been a migration in little, I think ; perhaps only the going-down of the Redstarts and Canadians to the lower valley of Broadhead's Creek, as I had found was the self-disposal of the Great-crests that had all disappeared by July 15, but which I found in plenty two weeks later down the valley, where Stony Creek joins the larger stream. I think it was a warbler migration in little because on my walk over the same ground the next morning, August 7, I saw only Black and White Creepers and Black-throated Blues and heard no warbler songs but theirs.

On the eve of our leaving I heard no Wood Robins or when, on August 8, I got back to the Wissahickon home, but the night before we left I heard Hermit Thrushes as full-voiced and eager to sing as in June. I went up the observatory on Buck Hill for a last look over the uplands, without thought of the thrushes, for I had never heard them there. It was halfpast seven when I reached the observatory. I sat there watching the mists and the oncoming night blotting out the hills. The Blue Mountain was but discernible, nothing more. The valley fog was rising from all the streams, although the country was very dry, suffering indeed from a great drought. High Knob in Pike County was fading away toward the northeast. Not a bird called until, just after I had taken in these details of the landscape all around, a distant tinkle of thrush music rang far off across the scrub. The singer came nearer and nearer, until I could see him as he sang from the dead top of a chestnut close by. Others joined in the song to the departing day, one by one, until three more were in hearing, but none of them was as this bird, full-voiced,—less metallic than is wont to be the Hermit's song, with his notes as fresh as if he had just come home. During his singing a Flicker rattled out his spring song and a Chewink called good-night, but the Thrush had the last word, silver-voiced and lonely.