

Nesting Birds of Pocono Lake

BY J. FLETCHER STREET

WAYLAYING birds in their nesting haunts was the conspicuous feature marking the activities of members of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club during the spring of 1915. Scientific data concerning the breeding haunts and habits of even some of our more common species was found to be incomplete and a strong determination to fill up these voids in the matter of club records seemed to possess each member individually. The results not only have been gratifying but have shown that there are many interesting facts yet to be learned of our common birds in the matter of behavior and distribution.

To extend this period of endeavor it was determined by a few of us to follow the gayly colored troop of warblers and their migrating associates to the Poconos, and there inquire more intimately into their habits. Dr. William E. Hughes, William L. Baily, George H. Stuart, 3rd, John D. Carter and the writer comprised the party.

To the writer as well as to the majority of the members of the D. V. O. C. the mention of the Poconos has always held a peculiar charm. The breeding there of several species of birds occurring about Philadelphia only as migrants is a sufficient reason for rendering a first trip to the Poconos a memorable one to the uninitiated.

When we arrived at Pocono Summit on the evening of June eleventh the country was shrouded in a heavy fall of rain, the end of a thunder shower which had swept up the valley of Broadhead's Creek in the late afternoon; but an automobile was there to meet us and our destination, the summer camp of Carter at Pocono Lake, was reached after an uneventful ride of nine miles.



NEST AND EGGS OF ALDER FLYCATCHER.

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER AT ENTRANCE TO NEST IN BED OF SPHAGNUM MOSS.

The general aspect of the region about Pocono Lake is suggestive of a typical boreal country, yet there are certain conspicuous areas of second growth resulting through the reforestation of burnt areas, which possess an environment not unlike that of the typical Carolinian regions farther south and support an invasion of such characteristic Carolinian forms, as the Yellow-breasted Chat and Chewink. The forests adjacent to Pocono Lake are principally of second growth and are composed of deciduous trees. Farther back pine, spruce and balsam hold sway, and wherever little streams break through, tamarack and rhododendron swamps abound, with associated flora of such conspicuous forms as the Withe Rod, Labrador Tea, Rhodora and Azalea canescens, and a wealth of herbaceous plants including the Dwarf Cornel, Trientalis, Painted Trillium, Golden Thread, Clintonia and in the more remote bogs the Creeping Snowberry, Calla and Linnaea.

How circumspect and limited one's impressions may become was evidenced on the morrow at daybreak, or rather during the gray hours preceding dawn, when the bird chorus broke forth. The writer, who had been accustomed to awaken from day to day to a medley of Carolinian bird-songs, was utterly confounded by a chorus of entirely unfamiliar notes. For the Wood Thrush call had been substituted the high-pitched, deliberate phrases of the Hermit. The Solitary Vireo had pre-empted the rights of the Red-eye. The Magnolia Warbler, it seemed, was contributing fully one-half the volume of the entire bird chorus, and as incidents to the whole the merry twitter of Juncos and the soft plaint of the White-throats were difficult to disassociate from bleak and wintry aspects of our home meadows.

The writer does not wish to convey the impression that the finding of bird nests in this varied and wooded country is an easy matter. On the contrary it is not. Most of the nests were located only after persistent and diligent search. Excepting to Baily and Carter the place was an unfamiliar one, and many of the species had never been noted by the rest of us save as migrants.

Pocono Lake is bordered by a narrow strip of timber princi-

pally of deciduous second-growth, which is separated from the more heavily wooded section to the rear by a roadway which follows its outline. It was here directly opposite the bungalow, that we hunted and found our first nest, that of the Grouse. The hen had flushed only after we had advanced to within five feet of its position and the nest was found without difficulty. It was located under a shrub in a low depression lined with leaves and contained but six, partly-incubated eggs. While approaching this Carter flushed a Chestnut-sided Warbler from its nest and announced four eggs. It was placed in a low birch sapling amid characteristic scrub growth. While here the note of the Alder Flycatcher was heard constantly along the lake borders and was recognized by Baily and Carter, who had become familiar with it as a resident, but had never been successful in obtaining its nest or eggs. As we had planned to spend our day in the vicinity of Butz Run, a favorite locality at the southern end of the lake, we did not tarry here.

We had proceeded but a short distance along the road when an excited Junco flew up at our feet, chirping incessantly. Its actions bespoke the presence of a nest and the surrounding area was searched without results. Some one suggested our retreating a short distance, which we did and almost immediately the mother bird returned, going directly to the hidden nest at the base of a huckleberry bush among dried leaves and bracken. Constructed principally of grasses and rootlets, it contained four pale blue eggs, heavily spotted with rufous, principally at the larger end. This nest had been built not over ten feet from the roadway and within five feet of a trail leading up to a bungalow, which was then under construction, with workmen passing by several times a day.

The Solitary Vireos were calling from the deeper woods behind us and we all penetrated confident of finding a nest. Several birds were watched and noted for hours on this and succeeding days but without success. A nest of the previous year, which was readily identified, was found hanging from a spruce limb at a height of five feet. Yet we were all glad to have spent this time among them, for the Solitary Vireo is truly a wonderful songster. As we listened to it, it sang, generally

in notes suggestive of the Red-eye, but clearer and pitched higher in scale. In the early mornings particularly, it would indulge us with a sustained warble of purest quality, generally rendered from a higher elevation.

While looking for the Solitary's nest the only Robin's nest found during our stay was discovered well up upon an outlying branch of a spruce tree. It was not a common species with us along the southern margin of the lake.

At length we reached Veery Cove at the extreme southwestern corner of Pocono lake. Here the lake converges into a narrow pointed wedge, pushing up under the roadway and receiving the waters of Butz Run. At Veery Cove thickets of rhododendrons abound. Here are the chosen haunts of the Black-throated Blue Warblers. Many were singing when we arrived there, so we instigated a search among them, crawling at times upon hands and knees to obtain an underside view of the foliage, so completely do the whorls of broad leaves hide the nests from view. There were surely at least a dozen breeding pairs in the vicinity, but all our efforts resulted in securing but a single nest. It was placed in a crotch of Rhododendron growth, not over two feet from the ground and well concealed by overlapping leaves. The nest was a closely woven affair of plant bark in grays and browns. The inner body was composed of coarse grasses and pine needles interwoven with a great quantity of black, hair-like rootlets. It contained but one egg finely spotted with pale purplish brown.

Carter announced another find and led us to the nest of a Canadian Warbler. It was cushioned in a loose mass of leaves and twigs carried down by some spring freshet and caught upon a rhododendron snag. It possessed deep-cupped walls of skeleton leaves woven in with fine rootlets. The four eggs were white with chestnut spots. The sitting bird expressed little concern at our presence and at one time Stuart approached within four feet of the nest before the bird quietly flew off and lost itself in the underbrush without uttering a note.

From here we penetrated the deeper woods above the stream, pausing at times to listen to Kinglet notes coming down from the tops of the tall spruces. Surely they must have nested

hereabouts in the earlier year, but we could gather no evidence of recent progenies. Here the Black-throated Green Warblers were incessant with song but no nest of the year could be found. Baily remarked that we were approaching the area where he had encountered the Nashville Warbler in other springs. Shortly he detected a song in the distance which he identified as of this bird. Presently we reached a partial clearing. Tamarack, balsam and spruce formed the principle tree-growth of the area ; viburnum and low huckleberries the shrub material and rolling mounds of sphagnum the ground cover ; conditions relating to a typical Canadian swamp. This was the haunt of the Nashville Warbler as well as a similar area about one hundred yards distant. Only in these two places were the birds noted during the five days of our stay. Baily had told us how he had found it nesting here two years previously, and how he had photographed the bird upon its nest.

We heard probably four singing birds altogether in the two bogs. They were not birds to be confidential with. Only with the greatest care might they be approached. The very restlessness of their nature seemed to impel them to be always on the move and to indulge in incessant song. The song comprised two distinct phrases ; the first, a tsipá, tsipá, tsipá, tsipá repeated from four to six times and in character suggestive of the deliberate, introductory notes of a Blackpoll Warbler's song ; the second, a clear trill, similar to the notes of the Pine Warbler ; altogether a very easy song to become familiar with.

After a thorough search of the two districts, upon the authority of Baily, we were able to announce three nests. These were all placed in the sides of sphagnum mounds and were lined with pine needles and soft grasses. One had a hole through the bottom of it. None of these contained eggs and no birds had been flushed from them. We waited about for hours hoping to see a nest visited, but no bird would approach closer than a nearby tree where perchance it would perch and sing lustily.

Another bird of this area, which we were coming to be acquainted with, was the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. It haunted the same open bogs as the Nashville and although its plain-

tive call-note was frequently heard, the bird itself was seldom observed.

To the east of those positions occur dense, low woods of spruce, so dense that little direct light penetrates them, so barren as to be utterly devoid of undergrowth, the ground beneath being covered deep with mats of brown needles. From the recesses of these frequently came the song of the Olive-backed Thrush. No nest was found.

Near the head of Butz Run the Parula Warbler was comparatively common. Beyond there is an absence of standing timber. Bleached boles clearly indicate the visitation of fire several years earlier. At a distance of probably one-half mile a solitary Olive-sided Flycatcher called from the top of a dead tree. "Quip-que-peu-áh" came his note from over the intervening spaces or "Three Cheers," as Stuart would have it. Into the late afternoon we hunted for its mossy nest among the isolated evergreens without success. Upon returning across these desolate sphagnum moors we were awarded with the sight of an eagle soaring high overhead.

When we returned that evening to the bungalow we again hunted in its immediate vicinity. On a spruce branch, six feet from the ground Carter discovered a Magnolia Warbler's nest. The nest was remarkable in its structure. Loosely woven grass-stems stretched out on all sides fully twelve inches from the bulk of the material. The nest itself was composed of grass and weed stems lined with vegetable fiber and black rootlets resembling horsehair. The four eggs possessed rufous-brown markings, principally at the larger end.

In a nearby thicket a Whitethroat's nest containing four eggs was found. Carter had again taken up the hunt for the nest of the Alder Flycatcher and carefully surveyed the swamp bordering the lake. At length he came across a small nest of bleached grasses, placed two feet from the ground in a viburnum bush. No bird had been noted in its vicinity. It remained to be absolutely identified upon another day.

At dusk Baily announced the finding of a Hermit Thrush's nest behind the bungalow in a raised hummock. It contained four eggs.

On the morrow we all went up the lake to a spot where Baily had encountered a number of Whip-poor-wills the night before. Here we found our second Oven-bird's nest which contained four eggs and Baily, at length, flushed a Whip-poor-will from its nesting site. Its two eggs had been laid directly upon the ground and when found, were separated by about three-quarters of an inch, indicating how the bird had sat between them with an egg concealed beneath each wing.

From here it was decided to cross the lake and work down the Tobyhanna Creek below the dam. After crossing we followed a pair of Blackburnian Warblers through the tree-tops with our glasses and thought that we detected them nest-building; at least, there was a dense bulk of material which they seemed to visit from time to time. Nothing definite could be determined, yet this was the nearest we came during our stay towards determining the nesting site of the species.

We soon came to an open area characterized by broad grass-fields and individual large spruces. Carter and Baily both had mentioned the trees as favored nesting-sites of the Purple Finch. We were not to be disappointed, for the song of the bird was everywhere and each tree-top seemed to possess at least one pair of birds. Several nests upon the outlying branches of spruces were examined but were found empty, indicating perhaps an earlier nesting season, but I remembered noticing a hen bird acting suspiciously and its later flight to the top of a small spruce not over ten feet in height. I lifted Stuart up and he startled the bird from its nest which contained two eggs. When the nest was again examined two days later it was found to have been destroyed. It is interesting to note that this grove appears to be the nesting site of most of the Purple Finches in the Pocono Lake region, only a few individual birds being heard outside of it during our entire stay.

From here, during the afternoon we worked down the valley of Tobyhanna Creek. A drizzling rain was falling and the character of the country did not offer an equal opportunity for nest-finding as that above the dam. Three Catbirds' nests and two of the Maryland Yellow-throat were all that this side excursion netted us. We made an early return to our bungalow.

During the evening it cleared and we all walked up the Lake road to the vicinity of Wolf's Spring Run, where we found Canadian Warblers in comparative abundance. The natural conditions here are similar to those of Butz Run and support similar bird-types. It was interesting to note the Chewink as a characteristic bird of the open shagnum bogland adjacent to this area, amid conditions so dissimilar to typical Carolinian country.

On the next day Carter slipped out in the early morning without arousing any of us as, if he had something important on his mind, only to return shortly and announce that there was an egg in the Alder Flycatcher's nest. This was a welcome declaration.

Upon leaving the bungalow after breakfast we split forces; Baily and Hughes going up to Wolf's Spring Run and Carter, Stuart and myself holding Butz Run as our destination. Our purpose was to further examine the supposed nests of the Nashville Warbler, a day having intervened since our initial visit. We were disappointed not to find a single egg in any of the nests; nor were we able to determine by the actions of the bird anything that would indicate ownership. Both the Nashville Warbler and the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher frequented the areas as before.

Out in the open barrens at the head of Butz Run could be heard the call of the Olive-sided Flycatcher and it was interesting to identify here as well the Alder Flycatcher, which we had associated heretofore only with the borders of the Lake.

Upon our return Carter flushed a Hermit Thrush from its nest, set even with the ground in a bed of Wintergreen.

Baily and Hughes had been more successful; Baily had found another Canadian Warbler's nest with two eggs at Wolf's Spring Run; Hughes had located a White-throated Sparrow's nest with four eggs and among sphagnum moss a Chewink's nest with young.

In the early afternoon Bailey, Hughes and myself left for home. As we motored from the Camp to the railroad station we noted several old barns where Cliff Swallows had established nesting-sites along the eaves. Forty nests were counted along a single eave.

Carter and Stuart remained two days longer. On the sixteenth, near the head of the Lake, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were observed feeding young, which fact establishes the early breeding of this species in the region. Several Bronzed Grackles were seen and the first Veery's nest was found.

On the twenty-sixth of June Stuart and myself returned to the Poconos and spent the day there. Our mission was to collect the nest of the Alder Flycatcher which contained but one egg when Stuart and Carter left on the sixteenth and to inquire further into the nesting habits of the Nashville Warbler.

When we examined the Alder Flycatcher's nest in the early morning, we were dismayed to find that it had been destroyed. Evidently the bird had become aware of its discovery and had done away with it. We hunted the neighboring swamp for a new one, but without success. It was to be regretted that this first record of the nest from Pennsylvania was to be obliterated in this manner.

Yet we hoped for better fortune among our so-called Nashville Warblers' nests in the tamarack swamps of Butz Run. Here, too, disappointment awaited us, for not one of the three nests contained an egg. We were beginning to believe that our trip was to be a fruitless one when Stuart flushed a bird, which he recognized to be a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, as it paused a moment upon a low shrub before him. At his feet in the side of a raised sphagnum mound reposed its nest. Formed of moss, soft grasses and pine needles, it was a nest well worth the trip to have obtained. It contained four eggs of creamy white with pale cinnamon-brown spots. What was the value of the find? It convinced us that the nests that we had been holding under observation were old or abandoned ones of this species and not of the Nashville Warbler. On this day no Nashville Warblers were heard in either of the two bogs where the nests occurred. The presence of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was still marked. Later in the morning we heard two Nashvilles in the open sphagnum moors above Butz Run, which seemed to establish them, as summer residents however, about Pocono Lake. Who will determine their nesting grounds?

The Olive-sided Flycatcher which had been so conspicuous a

bird of this district in the earlier month was no longer to be found. Nests of the Cedarbird and the Black-throated Green Warbler were new ones obtained this day; they had not been secured earlier in the month.

When we returned to Philadelphia, Baily was advised of our finding the nest of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. He at once looked up the photographs which he had taken two years before and was convinced that his nest also was that of the Flycatcher and not of the Nashville Warbler as he had assumed. His photographs of the bird upon the nest clearly indicate the pale eye-ring of the Flycatcher and the white upon the wing coverts. It is indeed interesting to note that these pictures had been shown before a convention of the American Ornithologists Union as being of the Nashville Warbler, without arousing any adverse comment. However, it remained for Baily to complete the work of this expedition. On July 17th he again visited the swamp border, where we found and lost the first nest of the Alder Flycatcher. "On July 17th," he writes, "I found a new nest containing three fresh eggs in almost the same spot or within six feet of the former nest; it was well hidden and it was by the luckiest chance that I happened to see it. The bird was not flushed, but was generally heard uttering its short, harsh note at a distance of one hundred to five hundred feet away, giving little clew to the general position of the nest. While I was photographing, the parent bird ventured within fifteen feet of me, yet all the time hidden in the thickets and occasionally uttering an unconcerned low single note. The nest was built of soft, bleached grass, lined with fine thin material. The eggs were rich cream color spotted almost exactly like the Wood Pewee's egg. I think this nest is the first recorded in the State."

On July 19th Baily again visited the tamarack swamps above Butz Run and found another nest of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher with young.

What were the net results of these days spent among Pocono birds? Sixty-eight species had been observed, twenty-seven of which were found nesting; of Canadian forms there were ten, of Transitional three, of forms extending from the Transitional into the Carolinian seven, of species widely spread eight.