

THE BREEDING BIRDS OF THE WISSAHICKON

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The area covered by this paper is a portion of Fairmount Park consisting of the Wissahickon Valley between Kitchen's Lane and Germantown Pike, the Cresheim Valley as far north as Germantown Avenue, and Carpenter's Woods.

I have lived my entire life on the edges of, or near, the Cresheim and Wissahickon Valleys and have spent a great deal of time there accumulating information included in this paper.

William H. Trotter, a former member of the D.V.O.C., found many nests between 1898 and 1931. His unpublished notes have recently been presented to our library by his daughter, Elizabeth Trotter, and have been used freely.

J. C. Tracy published a paper (*Cassinia*, 1942, pp. 35-41) on the Cresheim Valley with particular attention to that portion between Germantown Avenue and the McCallum Street Bridge.

In the Cresheim Valley several landmarks referred to by Trotter and Tracy have disappeared in the last ten or fifteen years. A pond known as Lake Surprise just below the railroad bridge has been filled in and is now a picnic ground, and a house known as Buttercup Cottage, which stood near the pond, has been torn down. The barn on this property still stands and has been converted to other uses by Fairmount Park.

James Bond, Richard Miller, William Jay, and many others have furnished information which has been most useful, and Bond has willingly given advice in the planning and preparation of this paper.

The information which follows is divided into two sections: (1) birds which breed regularly in the area or its edges, and whose nests have been found; (2) an annotated list of other species which have nested, might possibly nest, or about which some special comment is desirable.

Due to the local nature of this paper scientific names are unnecessary and are omitted. Common names follow the A.O.U. Checklist, 1957.

Regular Breeding Birds

Cooper's Hawk	Yellow-shafted Flicker
Broad-winged Hawk	Hairy Woodpecker
Sparrow Hawk	Downy Woodpecker
Ring-necked Pheasant	Great Crested Flycatcher
Mourning Dove	Eastern Phoebe
Screech Owl	Acadian Flycatcher
Chimney Swift	Eastern Wood Pewee
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Barn Swallow

Blue Jay	Louisiana Waterthrush
Common Crow	Kentucky Warbler
Fish Crow	Yellowthroat
Tufted Titmouse	Yellow-breasted Chat
White-breasted Nuthatch	House Sparrow
House Wren	Common Grackle
Carolina Wren	Brown-headed Cowbird
Catbird	Scarlet Tanager
Brown Thrasher	Cardinal
Robin	Indigo Bunting
Wood Thrush	American Goldfinch
Starling	Rufous-sided Towhee
Yellow-throated Vireo	Chipping Sparrow
Red-eyed Vireo	Field Sparrow
Ovenbird	Song Sparrow

Annotated List

GREEN HERON. Tracy saw this bird in the Cresheim Valley during the breeding season, and I suspect that one bred near Lake Surprise several years before his paper came out, but the nest was never found.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON. Harvey Moore showed me a small colony in the Andorra Nurseries opposite the Whitemarsh Country Club about 1940. While this colony was not in the area under discussion, it is interesting as an indication that the bird may possibly have bred in the area at some time in the past.

WOOD DUCK. A pair of Wood Ducks has been noted during the breeding season, but no nest has been found. This is the only wild duck which may have bred, as we do not consider the Mallards feral birds.

TURKEY VULTURE. Trotter found a nest on the west side of the Wissahickon April 22, 1923, and again April 13, 1928. He states in his notes that it did not breed in the intervening years, and no one has reported it since.

BOBWHITE. One of my early recollections as a child is the sight of a female with a flock of young in the Cresheim Valley. I last heard the whistle there in April, 1935. The bird undoubtedly bred later along the edges of the woods on the west side of the Wissahickon, but housing developments have occupied the open spaces there now and the species no longer nests. A few birds still live in the Morris Arboretum just above our area.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER. Trotter found the first nest May 22, 1899, near Lake Surprise and several others later. Present conditions in the park have undoubtedly eliminated the bird as a breeder.

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO. A very late nest, containing two young birds about ten days old and one much younger, was found by Trotter, August 24, 1931.

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO. Mary Bond found a nest in the Cresheim Valley. This species is not as common as the preceding one.

LONG-EARED OWL. This owl has been seen near Bell's Mill Road several times in the breeding season, but no nest has been found.

BELTED KINGFISHER. Tracy found a nest in a bank in the grove of white pines which stands on the south side of the lower Cresheim Valley. This locality has not changed very much since his paper was written, and I believe it possible that the kingfisher may still occasionally breed there.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER. This bird appeared in the area during the breeding season in 1955, but it was not until 1959 that Cadbury found the nest in Carpenter's Woods and Ulmer and Wonderly on the west side of the Wissahickon near the upper end of the park. It nested in the latter location in 1960 but not in 1961.

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER. During my early life this woodpecker was of fairly common occurrence. Trotter found a nest June 14, 1903, and another June 20, 1916. It was not long after the latter date that it disappeared from the area.

EASTERN KINGBIRD. This species is not common. Trotter found one nest July 9, 1899, and two more July 14, 1899.

ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW. The masonry of the bridges furnishes these birds with nesting sites. Trotter found them at the Rex Avenue Bridge and Bond at the Germantown Pike Bridge.

CAROLINA CHICKADEE. On May 23, 1954, I found a pair feeding young in a stub near the bend in the Wissahickon below Germantown Pike bridge.

MOCKINGBIRD. It is only in the last few years that this bird has appeared. The population has been building up rapidly along the edges of the park, and a nest with young was found on June 6, 1962, by J. S. Diston.

VEERY. Trotter never found a nest of this species, but he noted a singing male May 31, 1921. It has since become a regular and widely distributed breeder.

EASTERN BLUEBIRD. Formerly one would find these birds along the golf course above Hartwell Lane, but they have been absent in recent years.

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER. I found the first nest in this area, near the upper end, on May 12, 1956. It was about thirty feet up in a red maple. Individuals had been seen during the breeding season for about ten years previous to that date.

WHITE-EYED VIREO. Trotter stated May 5, 1932, that the bird "is not often seen here." That is certainly not true today, for I see it regularly every year. No nest has been found, however.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER. The nest reported by Miller (*Cassinia*, 1912, p. 52) must be regarded as invalid, as he later stated that he found an empty nest with a Black-and-white Warbler near it but did not see the young.

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER. From 1947 to 1955 this warbler was seen almost yearly near the upper end of the park. The nest was found June 10, 1954, by Jean Jones and Jean Walters. It was situated ten feet up in a stub near the summer house located on the drive close to Northwestern Avenue, a dry location. I saw a female carrying nesting material May 28, 1955, but there are no records during the breeding season since that date.

WORM-EATING WARBLER. These warblers are generally found in the Bell's Mill Road area. Trotter found a nest June 13, 1898, and Miller discovered others in later years.

BLUE-WINGED WARBLER. This warbler nests regularly along the west side of the main stream near Thomas Mill Road. Trotter kept a careful record of one nest in 1914; his data are given below:

May 20 - found parent building and tracked to location

May 24 - 1 egg

May 26 - 3 eggs

May 28 - 5 eggs

June 8 - all eggs hatched; incubation period 11 days

June 14 - young still in nest but well feathered

June 16 - young left nest, eight days after hatching

YELLOW WARBLER. This is a possible breeder. I have seen a singing male several times near the upper part of Thomas Mill Road on the west side of the main stream.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER. In June and July of 1949 Tracy saw two pairs of these warblers near Valley Green, but found no nest. Since this is the only record of this bird in the region during the breeding season, the A.O.U. Checklist (1957) is in error in including Philadelphia in the breeding range of this species.

CERULEAN WARBLER. Evelyn Kramer found the first nest May 14, 1955, near Bell's Mill Road. This warbler began to appear in the area two or three years previously and has now become a regular breeder.

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER. A pair was seen by several observers near Thomas Mill Road during May and early June of 1954, but it is very doubtful that a nest was built.

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER. It was about 1930 that this bird began to remain in our area during the breeding season. It now breeds regularly on the west side of the Wissahickon along Thomas Mill Road.

PRAIRIE WARBLER. It is possible that this species has nested on the west side of the Wissahickon near Bell's Mill Road, as both sexes have been seen there during the breeding season. However, no nest has been found to date.

HOODED WARBLER. For the last three years singing males have established territory at two widely separated locations, one on the west side of the main stream at the top of the hill where the bridle path descends to Bell's Mill Road and the other near Devil's Pool at the mouth of the Cresheim Creek, but no nest has been found.

AMERICAN REDSTART. Bond recorded a pair carrying food in 1952, nest building in 1960, and a nest in which young were hatched in 1961. All were near the upper end of the park.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE. Tracy found a nest near the upper end of the Cresheim Valley, and there are other scattered locations.

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK. A breeding record for this species May 25, 1928, in the Andorra Nurseries was reported (*Cassinia*, 1949-50, p. 36) as the first nest in the city. This statement was in error as Miller found two nests in Torresdale in 1915. The 1928 record is the first one for the area under discussion.

In conclusion it may be stated that the nests of sixty-seven species have been found in the area under discussion. Of these, seven have nested rarely, and four no longer breed there. In addition to these there is one species that undoubtedly nests and three more which may possibly breed.

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