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Bulletin 12 - Evans obit. Bird Study in the Rural School

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WILLIAM MONROE EVANS, B. S., LITT. D.

TEACHER IN

The Eastern Illinois State Normal School

September, 1899 to November, 1904

Born October 18, 1859.

Died November 27, 1904.

The School Calendar

Winter Term

Twelve Weeks

1905

January 3, Tuesday

*Entrance Examinations and
Classification. Class work
assigned at 4 P. M.*

March 24, Friday

Winter Term ends

Spring Term

Eleven Weeks

1905

April 4, Tuesday

Class work begins

June 16, Friday

Spring Term ends

Summer Term

Six Weeks

1905

June 19, Monday

*Classification. Class work
assigned at 4 P. M.*

July 28, Friday

Summer Term ends

Normal School Bulletin

PUBLISHED BY THE EASTERN ILLINOIS STATE NORMAL SCHOOL

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CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS, APRIL 1, 1905.

No. 12.

BIRD-STUDY IN THE RURAL SCHOOL

By THOMAS L. HANKINSON, B. S.

The country school situated in a region rich in natural objects and with pupils many of whom are at the age when eagerness for knowledge of such objects is best developed, seems to be a place well adapted for nature-study. This subject is making its way but slowly, however, into the rural school curriculum. For this, there are several reasons, one of the chief of which is, that many country school teachers are not sufficiently acquainted with the objects in their natural environment to enable them to guide their pupils in such study. It is the purpose of this article to give the teacher of the rural school a few directions for independent study of birds—a class of objects particularly well adapted for one who wishes to introduce nature-work into his school. The study of birds has to most pupils not only educational value, but also great interest, and it often proves an attractive gateway to the general field of biology. The kind of bird-study to which I refer in this article is that which concerns not birds stuffed or caged, but free and living in their natural haunts.

It may seem impossible for a country school teacher, unaided as he is by a museum collection, a large library, or an instructor, to acquire much knowledge of birds, but these handicaps may be largely overcome by means of one or more of the several bird manuals recently published. Of these, I know of no better book than Chapman's "Bird-Life," colored plate edition, published by D. Appleton and Co., New York, and sold for \$2.00. By means of this any teacher ought in a short time, perhaps in a single season, to become acquainted with about fifty of our common birds of Eastern Illinois. It is only the common birds that one should try to become familiar with at first; the rarer ones can then be learned more easily.

If possible, bird-study should be begun in the winter, for confusion caused by an abundance of species is then avoided. Opera or field glasses are a great aid in observing, but they are not indispensable. One should begin with the birds of his own home or school premises. The larger these grounds and the more trees and bushes upon them, the more birds one is likely to see there. In such places, judging from observations made about Charleston during the last two winters, I should think that the beginner ought to acquaint himself with at least the following species in Eastern Illinois in the course of the winter:

ENGLISH SPARROW

TREE SPARROW

JUNCO

SONG SPARROW

CARDINAL

BLUE JAY

TUFTED TITMOUSE

CHICKADEE

NUTHATCH

DOWNY WOODPECKER

HAIRY WOODPECKER

If there is a grove of large trees near, FLICKERS, RED-HEADED WOODPECKERS, and RED-BELLIED WOODPECKERS may also be seen. PURPLE FINCHES and CEDAR WAXWINGS are about the

yard and in orchards during some winter seasons. A trip to the open field will acquaint one with the PRAIRIE HORNED LARK, which also often comes to feed in the vicinity of the house or barn. From my experience in Eastern Illinois, I should say that the winter woods offer to the beginning student little in the way of bird-life that is not in the farmyard. BOB-WHITES are found about the woods, but these are often seen in the open fields and sometimes about the barnyard as well, if they are not frequently molested. CROWS are usually common in the woods and fields all winter. The SPARROW HAWK and a few other birds of prey may be identified during this season.

One can easily increase the number of birds about one's premises in the winter by placing out food for them. Sweepings from the hayloft will attract Tree Sparrows, Juncos, and other seed-eaters. Crumbs, meat rinds, and pieces of suet placed upon some support above the ground, such as a veranda roof, will bring Nuthatches and Chickadees. Bones with some meat upon them, if tied to a tree trunk or limb, will furnish food for Woodpeckers. A bird's life in winter is usually a hard struggle for food, and by supplying this need the student is often repaid for his little trouble by the excellent chance he gains of observing bird ways.

All of the kinds mentioned so far are described and some of them figured in "Bird-Life" and the student will make a good beginning by learning to know even this small number during his first winter's study. By learning to know a bird, I do not mean simply finding out its name, though that is necessary as a first step in order that we may talk or write about it. By careful observation one may gather much information concerning any one species.* In fact, each presents a field

*For an example of an excellent piece of work upon a single species, see "A Monograph on the Flicker," written by Frank L. Burns. This can be obtained by sending 50 cents to Lynds Jones, Oberlin, Ohio.

E A S T E R N I L L I N O I S S T A T E

for investigation, the bounds of which no scientist has yet discovered; consequently it is possible even for the beginner to contribute to ornithology new facts that are of real value in building up the science.

In the early spring the birds return from the south at a slow enough rate for the beginner to identify them, but after about the middle of April they come too rapidly for him. No discouragement need be felt, however, because all of the spring birds cannot be learned in one season. The species in the list here given, I think, are common in all parts of Eastern Illinois at some time during the spring season, and I am sure that most of them can be seen and identified in this region by an enthusiastic student during his first spring of bird-study.

Acquaintances to be made during March and early April

ROBIN	GOLDFINCH
BLUEBIRD	WHITE-THROATED SPARROW
CROW BLACKBIRD	FOX SPARROW
RED-WING BLACKBIRD	FIELD SPARROW
COWBIRD	VESPER SPARROW
MEADOWLARK	KINGFISHER
MOURNING DOVE	PHOEBE
BROWN THRASHER	LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE
KILLDEER	BROWN CREEPER
TOWHEE	CAROLINA WREN

Acquaintances to be made in later April and in May

Birds more common about the farmyard or vicinity

KINGBIRD	PURPLE MARTIN
CATBIRD	BARN SWALLOW
HOUSE WREN	YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER
BALTIMORE ORIOLE	CHIMNEY SWIFT
ORCHARD ORIOLE	RUBY-THROATED
CHIPPING SPARROW	HUMMINGBIRD
MARYLAND YELLOW-THROAT	

N O R M A L S C H O O L B U L L E T I N

Birds more common in the open field

DICKCISSEL	GRASSHOPPER SPARROW
LARK SPARROW	SAVANNA SPARROW

Birds more common in the woodland

SCARLET TANAGER	INDIGO BIRD
SUMMER TANAGER	OVEN BIRD
ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK	BLUE-GREY GNATCATCHER
WOOD THRUSH	YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO
MYRTLE WARBLER	YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT
CRESTED FLYCATCHER	RED-EYED VIREO
WOOD PEWEE	

When June comes, the student will probably do little more in the way of identification of species, but he can spend his time to advantage in studying the habits of a number of the birds whose acquaintances he made in the winter and spring. The song and nesting season for most kinds is at its height in June. Then the woods and fields should be searched for nests, and when one is found, it should not be disturbed in any way. It is hardly necessary to say that the eggs should not be removed or handled. Many birds are very timid about their nests and often they will desert them, eggs and all, if they find that they have been discovered. For this reason the observer should use great care and approach the nest as little as possible. He should secrete himself at a convenient distance with note-book and with opera glasses, if he has them, and then watch and take notes. Much can be learned in this way about the bird's domestic habits, such as its manner of caring for nest, eggs, and young, the amount and kind of food provided for the latter, the time required for incubation, the period of occupancy of the nest by the young, and the relative amount and kind of attention given to nesting affairs by each parent. The development of plumage on

nestlings is a subject of especial interest. If a series of photographs of the growing young can be made without interfering too seriously with the home life of the parent birds, it will prove of much interest and value to the student. After the young have left the nest, its structure and position can be studied at close range. It may then be handled or even removed, for the birds have no further use for it.*

As the summer goes on, bird-life becomes less and less conspicuous. The nesting season is over. Most songs cease. The molting process takes place, and plumages become ragged and often much changed in color, thus making some birds difficult to recognize. In the fall, however, there is a revival to activity on the part of a number of species. Flocks are formed, and a few birds have a season of song before departing on the southward journey.

Although the spring and early summer offer more attractions to the bird student than other seasons do, still there is something about them to be learned from nature at all times of the year and at all times of the day. Even at night we are often reminded of birds by their notes. The Whip-poor-will makes known his presence by his call only at that time. Some diurnal birds may also be heard at night, especially during the migrating seasons. At such times those which travel after dark often fly low, more usually when the weather is rainy or foggy, and many species can then be identified by their calls.

As far as possible, knowledge of birds should be obtained at first hand—that is, by direct observation from nature, but there is much about them that can not be learned in this way. Consequently reading should be done upon the general

*A student of bird nests will do well to get a copy of "Bird Homes," by A. C. Dugmore, published by Doubleday, Page, McClure & Co., New York. Price \$2.00. This contains many fine descriptions and excellent illustrations of nests and eggs and young birds.

subject of ornithology, on which there are many excellent books. Without trying to discuss this literature, I will simply mention three that I think every bird-lover should read.

"Birds through an Opera Glass," by Florence A. Merriam. Published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co., New York. Price 75 cts.

"A Year with the Birds," by Wilson Flagg. Published by the Educational Publishing Co., Boston. Price \$1.00.

"The Story of the Birds," by James Newton Baskett. Published by D. Appleton & Co., New York. Price 65 cts.

Every student should subscribe for a little magazine called "Bird-Lore," which is published by the Macmillan Co., Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Subscription price \$1.00 a year.

After a year's study of birds, if not before, a teacher will probably want a field manual that is more comprehensive than "Bird-Life." I should advise, then, the purchasing of Chapman's "Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America." This is published by Appleton & Co., New York. Price of flexible-cover pocket edition, \$3.50; cloth edition, \$3.00. It contains good descriptions of plumages of male, female, young, eggs, and nests of nearly every species in Eastern North America; it has, moreover, many good descriptions of habits, besides valuable suggestions for the bird student. Recently Mr. Chapman with Mr. Reed has published a "Color Key to North American Birds" (Doubleday, Page & Co. Price \$2.50). This contains many figures, which, with the descriptions, to a great extent simplify identification.

After the teacher has made some progress in the study of birds, he should introduce the subject to his pupils. Little effort will be needed to arouse an interest, for it is present already in most children.* Care must be taken, however,

*See F. M. Chapman on "Educational Value of Bird Study," Educational Review, volume 17, pages 242-249.

especially with the boys, to keep the interest properly directed. It should be toward live and free birds and not toward those killed with his gun, and toward eggs undisturbed in the nest, and not toward their empty shells in his curiosity collection.

A love for the *living* bird should constantly be stimulated by the teacher. This can be done by proper management of the work. Before the minds of the pupils facts concerning the value of birds to man from an economic as well as from an aesthetic standpoint should be presented often. The celebration of a bird day has been tried by many schools with success.* The making of nesting boxes, preparation of food charts and blackboard lists, are all good ways of instructing and interesting children in this subject.†

Ornithology need not have a regular place in the daily curriculum of the school. It may be indulged in at times for the purpose of resting the minds of the pupils from book work. As the subject is studied for the most part out of doors and much fresh air and exercise are involved in its pursuit, it may be considered as one of the school recreations as well as one of its studies.

What will result from the study of birds in the rural school? In the first place, the pupil's power of observation and aesthetic sense will certainly be cultivated, and a love for birds will be aroused that should cause him always to use his influence for their protection. It is protection that the birds need, for they are becoming less numerous over the greater part of the United States.‡ Mr. Hornaday estimates,

*For suggestions concerning a bird day, send 35 cts. to Silver, Burdett & Co., Chicago, for a little book entitled "Bird Day and How to Prepare for it."

†See chapters of bird-study in Hodge's "Nature Study and Life," published by Ginn & Co., Boston and Chicago. Price \$1.50.

‡See a paper entitled "The Destruction of Our Birds and Mammals," by W. T. Hornaday, published by the New York Zoological Society, 11 Wall St., New York. Price 15 cts.

from much data received from reliable observers from various parts of this state, that the birds had decreased 38 per cent. in Illinois during the fifteen years prior to 1901. What are the effects of this destruction of birds? The most important of the natural enemies of harmful insects are being removed, and crops are likely to be injured to an increasing extent by these pests. Entomologists estimate that insects cause a loss of two hundred millions of dollars yearly to agricultural interests in the United States. Prof. S. A. Forbes, who has been studying both the birds and insects of Illinois for many years, says, "It is true, * * * in my judgment, that the insects of the state of Illinois derive as large a profit from the agriculture of this great state as do the farmers themselves. It is probably true that they cost the state at least half as much as the whole system of public schools." Birds also do good in many other ways. Hawks and owls catch field mice, which every farmer knows are very destructive to crops. In fact, ornithologists have shown that these are among the most useful of all birds to the farmers. It is true that chickens are killed now and then and song birds are to some extent destroyed by these birds of prey, but there are only two kinds of hawks common in Illinois that do more harm than they do good. These are the little Sharp-shinned Hawk and its close relative, the Cooper's Hawk. Birds are also useful as scavengers. Our Turkey Vulture, commonly called the "Buzzard" in this region, does much good in this respect, especially in the south where it is abundant.

What are the causes for this decrease in bird-life? Mr. Hornaday enumerates eighteen, in all of which man is the principal factor. Ignorance seems to be the chief cause of man's actions in each case. Few girls would wear bird plumage on their hats if they knew the great amount of bird

destruction which, in many cases, they are causing by so doing. A boy would not be likely to shoot a song bird if he knew its real value in dollars and cents. It is knowledge, then, that is needed, and this is especially required by the farmer, who is probably more directly benefited by bird protection than anyone else. It seems to me that the rural school teacher is in an excellent position to impart to farmers, at least to those of the future generation, a knowledge of the value of birds* and how to protect them.†

The pleasure that accompanies bird-study will in most cases insure its continuance. I have never yet known a person to give up this subject when he had begun it with any degree of earnestness and when conditions were favorable for its pursuance, and I am sure that if the country school teacher and his pupils will find a few hours each week for studying these creatures they will have the same enjoyment and the same mental benefit as other students of this subject have had; and there will result a better protection for the birds, which are not only beautiful and interesting, but are also of such importance to us that, as scientists have shown, our existence would be impossible without them.

*Every teacher should read "Birds in Their Relation to Man," by C. M. Weed, published by Lippincott & Co., Boston. Price \$2.50.

†On means of protecting birds and encouraging their presence about the school or home, see "Our Native Birds," by A. Lang, published by the Macmillan Co., New York. Price \$1.00.

See also "How to Attract the Birds," by Neltje Blanchan, published by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York. Price \$1.25.

Illinois teachers should send 25 cents to Miss Mary Drummond, Secretary of the Illinois Audubon Society, Wheaton, Ill., for literature upon bird-protection.

Announcements for the summer session of the school, June 19 to July 28, will be issued about April 10. The courses on the State Course of Study, which were introduced last year, will be repeated, and Mr. Thomas M. Balliet, Dean of the School of Pedagogy of the University of the City of New York, will give a course of lectures. Any detailed information not contained in the circular may be had by addressing President L. C. Lord.

The School Calendar

Spring Term

Eleven Weeks

1905

April 4, Tuesday

June 16, Friday

Class work begins

Spring Term ends

Summer Term

Six Weeks

1905

June 19, Monday

July 28, Friday

*Classification. Class work
assigned at 4 P. M.*

Summer Term ends