

THE JACK-PINE WARBLER

Vol. 25

APRIL, 1947

No. 2



Published by the
MICHIGAN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Barrow's Golden-Eye Collected in Michigan

By Miles D. Pirnie

In recent years several of our members have reported seeing Barrow's Golden-eyes in the Battle Creek-Kalamazoo area. It has never been my good fortune to find this species, even though I have kept looking for them, but I have urged my hunter friends to report "funny looking" drake golden-eyes. Last November brought results, for a neighbor, Mr. Leigh M. Turner, thoughtfully phoned to report that his shooting party had taken a pair of golden-eyes the previous day at Gun Lake, Barry County, and he still had the drake which seemed to be a Barrow's. I needed no second invitation to go to his home; and a few minutes later I enjoyed the thrill of seeing and handling a new bird for the first time.

The accompanying photograph shows this drake in contrast with an adult drake American Golden-eye. Book descriptions make much of the smaller bill, more purplish head, and the spotted scapulars of the drake Barrow's. Still more striking to me, in comparing the two drakes photographed, were the **tufted nape** and **blackier wing** of the Barrow's. (The American has a much larger area of white lesser wing coverts.) Actually there was only a slight difference in head color; and the beaks were almost equal size. The white face crescent was slightly longer but narrower than the round face mark of the American.

This drake Barrow's was given to the University of Michigan Museums; and Dr. J. VanTyne says it is their first Michigan Barrow's specimen. Thanks are due Mr. Turner for his keen observation and thoughtfulness.

A Bachman's Sparrow at Dearborn, Michigan

By Alice D. Miller

May 8, 1946 marked the advent of a Bachman's Sparrow *Aimophila aestivalis bachmani* (Audubon) in my home territory at Dearborn. Very early in the morning as I listened to the symphonious chorus that goes on every morning at that time of year there came in clear, strong, penetrating tones from close by, the most brilliant wild bird song I had ever heard. For a while I lazily guessed what it might be, finally deciding that someone's pet canary had escaped, THEN! Quick, the binoculars. Tumble down stairs. Scan the territory. Ah, sure enough! There, directly across the

street (125 feet from our front door) perched on an outer middle branch of a small wild cherry tree sat a little bird looking much like a Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla pusilla* (Wilson) pouring out a canorous song which could not possibly belong to any of our resident birds. There can be no greater fun or excitement for a bird enthusiast than to have an unusual, distinguished bird pay him a visit.

There are about ten acres of vacant lots across the street besides a good deal of vacant property here and there. The soil is sandy and overgrown with weeds, wild flowers and wild blackberries. There are some scattered large oaks, elms and maples and a few scrub trees. About thirty feet in from the side walk is a clump of wild cherry trees and the largest of these, approximately twenty feet high, was the favorite perch. For the duration of its five days in our territory it did not often appear to leave this rather limited area.

The most distinguished feature of its appearance is the large bill which seems a bit out of proportion to its size of five and three fourths inches. The upper mandible is a darkish horn color and the lower mandible is a pearly horn color. The upper parts are a mouse gray and blackish streaked with rufous brown which, in some lights, looks like the reddish brown of a Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca iliaca* (Merrem). The rufous streaks on the back appear irregular. The bird does not have a sleek appearance. It looks a bit shabby, in fact. The cheeks are gray and this color arches up beautifully over the eye. There is a short rufous streak behind the eye. The wings are quite short and rounded and the bend of the wing is edged with the very tiniest light yellow feathers. The throat is very light gray, the breast only slightly darker and washed with a fawn color on sides and chest. The tail is very narrow, carried well down on the perch; as it flies the tail spreads slightly. When you look for the bird, watch for the bill. Otherwise, if it is not singing, you may think it is "just another sparrow."

The behavior was unique. It usually perched in plain sight on the middle or lower branches and for quite long periods of time in one place. The flights were short, usually an oblique descent to the ground where it zig-zagged about, feeding. Like a true artist it was composed and confident. It did not flush easily. One early morning I had studied it from all angles and I wanted it on the ground so I shook the lower branches a little. The bird merely moved to another branch of the same tree. At one time, as I stood very still, it came so near my feet that I began to plot ways of taking it alive because I knew from the beginning that this bird would have to be produced to be believed!

The true glory of the bird was its song. It had a call note similar to the Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina passerina* (Bechstein). The repertoire of song consisted of about six phrases with a few seconds pause between each phrase. The first and shorter part was trill-like and merged into the second longer warble-like part. There was one magnificent variation. My notes say that one time it was at the third phrase, again at the second, again at the fifth, but the bird opened his bill less wide and uttered his song a full octave higher. There is only one fitting description of the effect upon the listener—that 1946 expression, "it sends you". William J. Calvert, Jr., has given a detailed description of the song in an article published in the July-August, 1943 issue of the Audubon Magazine, pp. 205-8.

Several authorities—Dr. Frank Chapman, Mr. A. H. Howell and others agree that the song is "musically the most attractive of any of the sparrows." Several reports have likened the song to that of the canary. Some writers' notes say that the bird sings mostly in the early mornings and in the evenings. However, Captain Bendire quotes Dr. Avery (1888, one of the earliest records I found) as saying, "they sing at all hours of the day." This coincides with the generous performances of our Dearborn visitor.

One of the greatest satisfactions in amateur bird watching comes from making identifications to the best of one's ability before asking for help. With voluminous notes, I searched my meager supply of books. On page 49, Vol. III, of "Birds of America" edited by Dr. T. Gilbert Pearson I found a description that checked with my notes in every detail. Under the major heading of Pine Woods Sparrow *Aimophila aestivalis aestivalis* (Lichtenstein) it states that the northern variety is the Bachman's Sparrow. (In case you are interested, Encyclopaedia Britannica says, "the Rev. John Bachman was the father-in-law of Audubon's two sons.") I found little else at the time except that it had never been recorded this far north before and that there was only one other Michigan record. All books consulted indicated that its most northerly range is central Ohio and central Illinois. It was time to call someone more expert than I. Mr. Ralph O'Reilly, one of the very active members of the Detroit Audubon Club, came out and I hope that he will add a note to this report to state the disposition we made of the specimen.

A few significant references may help others who want to watch for this species. I felt a little disappointment at not finding another individual until I found this reference in "Birds of North Carolina" (1942) by Thomas G. Pearson: "never abundant or going in flocks, it is generally found

singly or in pairs". Some explanation of its being found in our area comes from a reference in "Birds of Western Pennsylvania" (1940) by W. E. Clyde Todd. He says, "According to W. W. Cooke (1914) it is, 'an example of a bird that is apparently extending its range. Within recent years it has become common locally in southern Virginia, and has increased around Washington, D. C. It has invaded Ohio, even to the northern part of the state and also western Pennsylvania'. The bird's present status in Ohio has been outlined by L. E. Hicks: 'As the first Ohio records for this species were in 1897, 1900 and 1901 it seems reasonably certain that this species has invaded the state from the south and southwest during the last half century. It now occurs in numbers locally in thirty-two counties of southern and eastern Ohio.' I added it to the Pennsylvania list in the spring of 1910." Cruickshank and Griscom both report that, "Mr. J. A. Weber collected a singing male at Fort Lee, New Jersey, May 9, 1918, the only record for that state." In the Auk of October, 1888 pp. 351-56, Capt. Charles E. Bendire refers to the Bachman's Sparrow as an, "interesting species still imperfectly known. Distribution not well defined. According to Ridgway's Manual of North American Birds its habitat includes southern Indiana and Illinois."

It might be supposed from the published notes about this bird that it has a pioneering spirit. To have seen it, and especially to have heard it, is to have enjoyed a rare treat. I trust that many of you also will see and hear it in other territories.

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Second Bachman's Sparrow for Michigan

By Ralph A. O'Reilly, Jr.

The bird described by Mrs. Miller was collected in the city of Dearborn on May 13, 1946, for positive identification. It proved to be a male, and the second specimen of Bachman's Sparrow taken in Michigan. The skin was deposited in the collection of the University of Michigan, Museum of Zoology. One previous Michigan specimen was taken near North Cape, Erie Township, Monroe County, on April 29, 1944, by Harold Mayfield and Louis W. Campbell of Toledo (Wilson Bulletin, 56, 1944:174), and was also a male, but not in song when collected. The present observation appears to represent the northernmost extension of the bird's range.

The northward movement of the Bachman's Sparrow is well established, and observers might well commit its de-

scription to memory and watch suitable habitats for further occurrences. In the field the bird superficially resembles a Field Sparrow, but as indicated, the song is extremely distinctive.

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On Conducting Field Trips*

By Miles D. Pirnie, Michigan State College

Well over one thousand biology classes, nature clubs, and other groups have visited the W. K. Kellogg Bird Sanctuary in the past fifteen years, and it has been my duty and privilege to help their leaders make these visits both entertaining and instructive. Recently, with the counselors of school camps planning all-day trips to the sanctuary, I have had occasion to review the good and bad points of past field trips. I list the following comments in the hope some teachers may find here some helpful hints; for conducting out-door classes is not an easy thing to do. Under intelligent leadership, much training is better given on farms, in woods, at wildlife sanctuaries and zoos, than in the school room.

1. The leader must be responsible for and must have the respect of the group. (We sanctuary directors, for example, can do little instructing if our attention is taken with policing "out-of-hand" groups.)

2. Prepare the group in advance of the trip by reviewing the history, objectives, and offerings of the place to be visited. When available, show kodachromes which deal with the chief points of interest.

3. Time spent in travel should seldom exceed that allotted for actual field work at the objective. Try to allow a minimum of two hours, and better still, four to six for field work. Divide the stay into two work periods with a recess or lunch hour for play and relaxation. This makes it possible to have order and attention during the study periods.

4. Expect members of the group to participate and even take turns leading the party, finding and explaining items within the scope of the trip. Unfortunately, some leaders "lecture" constantly and thereby lose all cooperation from the group, and the trip is a failure.

5. Devote only half or two-thirds of the field time to the conducted tour if in a wild habitat that permits of "exploring." Younger groups (ages 8 to 11) seem to respond well to this type of trip. Let them make discoveries of mammal tracks, bird