

WINTER BIRDS ABOUT WASHINGTON, D. C.,
1916-1917.BY W. L. MCATEE, E. A. PREBLE, AND
ALEXANDER WETMORE.

After having committed to the mails our 1916 Christmas Bird Census of 40 species and 752 individuals (made December 27: see Bird Lore, XIX, 1917, p. 25), the writer succeeded in making (on December 30, 1916), a record so much better—in fact, the best winter day's list for the region—that it seems well to publish this also. At the same time we take the opportunity to present a list of other birds that have been seen near Washington this winter, with brief notes on the more interesting species.

Our trip of December 30, 1916, was from Mt. Vernon to Dyke, Va., taking us along the partly frozen Potomac, over wooded bluffs, and through clearings, farm lands, pineries, and river swamps. The day was partly cloudy, with a temperature of $+20^{\circ}$ F. at 8 a. m. Observations were made between 9 a. m. and 5 p. m.

The species seen were: Herring Gull, 3; Hooded Merganser, 21; Canvas-back, 410; Golden-eye, 47; Ruddy Duck, 4; Bob-white, 16; Turkey Vulture, 8; Marsh Hawk, 1; Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1; Red-shouldered Hawk, 2; Kingfisher, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 3; Downy Woodpecker, 4; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 8; Red-headed Woodpecker, 6; Red-bellied Woodpecker, 1; Flicker, 3; Blue Jay, 12; Crow, 134; Fish Crow, 6; Starling, 9; Meadowlark, 4; Purple Finch, 5; Red Crossbill, 2; White-winged Crossbill, 2; English Sparrow, 20; Goldfinch, 10; Savanna Sparrow, 3; White-throated Sparrow, 51; Tree Sparrow, 76; Field Sparrow, 4; Junco, 176; Song Sparrow, 7; Chewink, 4; Cardinal, 7; Migrant Shrike, 1; Myrtle Warbler, 3; Mocking Bird, 5; Carolina Wren, 7; Winter Wren, 2; Brown Creeper, 5; White-breasted Nuthatch, 2; Red-breasted Nuthatch, 14; Tufted Titmouse, 11;

* Names are in alphabetical order; responsibility for the list is equal.

Carolina Chickadee, 20; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 16; Hermit Thrush, 1; Bluebird, 9. Total, 48 species and 1167 individuals.

Crossbills had been seen so often that early in the winter local ornithologists had high hopes that an "invasion" of northern birds was due; however, no other boreal species have been seen, though red-breasted nuthatches have been much more numerous than usual. The first crossbills were seen December 10, 1916, near Ashburn, Va., by E. R. Kalmbach, D. C. Mabbott, and W. L. McAtee, one white-winged crossbill being seen with a flock of half a dozen red ones. White-wings were next seen at Woodridge, D. C., on December 14, by Mabbott. On December 24, Alexander Wetmore found a female at Four Mile Run, Virginia, and that same afternoon about forty of the same species were seen at Woodridge, D. C., by E. G. Holt, Mabbott, and Wetmore. On December 27, while making our Christmas Bird Census, the writers observed others of this same species. At Four Mile Run one was first seen as it flew past high in air, and later was followed and located in a clump of Virginia pines. Later the same day at Dyke, Virginia, Wetmore and A. K. Fisher found a flock of seven in some low pines, and afterward observed others in deciduous trees. At dusk four or five flew into some cedars on a hillside, where they prepared to roost with the juncos. One of these crossbills was flushed from some low weeds when it was almost dark. On December 30, near Mt. Vernon, we saw two red and two white-winged crossbills, in some low dense pines that had overgrown an abandoned orchard. Occasional birds have been observed since the first of the year, but the wave of migration among them seemed to pass during the last week of December, and since that time the bulk of the crossbills appear to have betaken themselves elsewhere.

The ducks noted in our list were seen on the Potomac, where the birds were feeding in the channels and other open places amongst the ice. On December 30 yellow-bellied sapsuckers seemed almost common, and somewhat to our sur-

prise were attracted readily by "squeaking." Three Savanna sparrows were noted in a grassy field. Both these birds usually are rare in winter in this region.

Starlings have been fairly common in the vicinity of Washington this winter, and were seen on nearly every trip afield. They frequented the river flats and fields, mingling freely with crows, an act of familiarity that few native birds dare attempt.

On January 7, 1917, we found myrtle warblers common near Hunter, Virginia, in woods heavily grown up to underbrush, in which was an exceptional amount of holly.

Other species of birds additional to the forty-eight above listed that have been credibly reported in the Washington region during the winter (December 1, 1916, to February 15, 1917), include the following. Unless otherwise stated the observations have been made by one or more of the authors. No attempt has been made to use all known dates of occurrence, and certain records published in Bird-Lore for January-February, 1917, have been disregarded. All the localities named are within fifteen miles of Washington.

American Merganser.—Mt. Vernon, Va., January 20, 1917, four observed.

Mallard.—Dyke, Va., January 25, 1917, eight.

Black Duck.—Dyke, Va., December 27, 1916, three.

Buffle-head.—New Alexandria, Va., December 23, 1916, one (J. P. Young, Bird-Lore, 1917, p. 25).

Great Blue Heron.—Four Mile Run, Va., January 14, 1917, one; Dogue Creek, Va., January 20, one.

American Coot.—Dyke, Va., December 2, 1916, several recently killed were seen at a hunter's cabin.

Wilson Snipe.—Dyke, Va., December 2, 1916; remains of one killed, probably the preceding day, observed at a hunter's cabin.

Killdeer.—Arlington, Va., December 17, 1916, one; Brandywine, Md., December 2, five; Four Mile Run, Va., December 10, common; one seen December 24. Killdeer usually winter on the tidal basin at the mouth of Four Mile Run, but a heavy freeze drove them away this year.

Ruffed Grouse.—Between Contee and Bowie, Md., January 28, 1917, one.

Mourning Dove.—Snowden's, Va., January 7, 1917, five; others have been reported.

Cooper's Hawk.—Berwyn, Md., December 23, 1916, one; Bowie, Md., December 25, three.

Red-tailed Hawk.—Ashburn, Va., December 10, 1916.

Broad-winged Hawk.—Brandywine, Md., December 3, 1916; Ashburn, Va., December 10.

Duck Hawk.—At least one has been seen on the tower of the Post Office Department Building this winter, as has usually been the case during the past few years.

Sparrow Hawk.—Ashburn, Va., December 10, 1916, two; Arlington, Va., January 1, 1917 (Miss May T. Cooke).

Barn Owl.—One seen at dusk flying above Pennsylvania Avenue, January 3, 1917; two in the northwest tower of the Smithsonian Institution, January 8, 1917.

Barred Owl.—Arlington, Va., two (probably a pair), December 27, 1916; Dyke, Va., 3, same date; Plummers Island, Md., February 1, 1917, two.

Saw-whet Owl.—Silver Spring, Md., one, November 30, 1916 (A. K. Fisher).

Screech Owl.—Washington, D. C., December 23, 1916, two (J. P. Young, *Bird Lore*, 1917, p. 25); Cleveland Park, D. C. February 14, 1917, one.

Prairie Horned Lark.—Ashburn, Va., December 10, 1916, two; between Contee and Bowie, Md., January 28, 1917, twenty-five.

Red-winged Blackbird.—Berwyn, Md., December 23, 1916, three (E. R. Kalmbach and I. N. Gabrielson, *Bird Lore*, 1917, p. 24).

Rusty Blackbird.—Four Mile Run, Va., December 10, 1916, one; Arlington, Va., December 27, one (probably a cripple).

Crow Blackbird.—Brandywine, Md., December 2, 1916, many thousands in flying flocks; Dyke, Va., December 27, nine; Washington, D. C., Woodridge, D. C. January 27 (D. C. Mabbott).

Pine Siskin.—Four Mile Run, Va., December 3, 10 and 24, 1916, small flocks in Virginia pines.

Chipping Sparrow.—Ashburn, Va., December 10, 1916, one.

Swamp Sparrow.—Arlington, Va., December 27, 1916, five.

Fox Sparrow.—Ashburn, Va., December 10, 1916; others were reported in the vicinity of Washington at various times during December.

Cedarbird.—Ashburn, Va., December 10, 1916.

Cape May Warbler.—A living bird caught during a snow storm on December 16, 1916, was brought to Dr. C. W. Richmond at the U. S. National Museum (*Auk*, 1917, p. 343).

Pipit.—New Alexandria, Va., December 23, 1916, one (J. P. Young,

Bird Lore, 1917, p. 26). Though this bird is considered as a winter resident the earliest recorded spring date is February 16, 1908.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet.—Four Mile Run, Va., December 27, 1916, two.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.—Arlington, Va., January 1, 1917, one (Miss May T. Cooke); the earliest recorded spring date is March 30, 1907.

Robin.—January 3, 1917, one (H. H. T. Jackson). A robin frequented the holly trees in the Smithsonian Grounds during the first week in February. The species arrived in large numbers from the South soon after the middle of February.

The species observed by the authors on December 30, 1916, together with those noted at other times by various observers make a total of 81 species that have been seen in the vicinity during the past winter. Doubtless others have been present, but have been overlooked.

Referring to the District of Columbia list (Cooke, Proc. Biol. Soc. Washington, XXI, 1908, pp. 107-118), we find 109 species which may be considered as winter residents, taking the dates used by us (December 1-February 15), as a basis. Of these Cooke lists 43 species as winter residents. The present list includes all of these latter except 7. One of them, the Wild Turkey, is now practically extirpated as a District species. Two others are rare in winter, while the other three are seldom found here at any season.

Of the entire number of birds observed this winter, only a few can be considered as rare species about the District of Columbia. Those best entitled to be so considered are the Ruffed Grouse, Saw-whet Owl, White-winged and Red Cross-bills, and the Pipit. The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, a common summer resident, is now first added to the number that have been found in winter; the Myrtle Warbler and Mourning Dove are among the rarer residents at this season. The Cape May Warbler is of course only of accidental occurrence at this time.



McAtee, W. L., Preble, Edward Alexander, and Wetmore, Alexander. 1917.
"Winter Birds about Washington, D. C., 1916-1917." *The Wilson bulletin* 29(4),
183–187.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/38327>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/207604>

Holding Institution

American Museum of Natural History Library

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: NOT_IN_COPYRIGHT

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.