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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1936. R Y

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Bureau of Biolog-
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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In 3 Hh
Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Listeners, have you been watching the birds flying south for the winter? Our Department-of-Agriculture correspondent says she has. In fact, her letter today is all about this annual trip of our American birds.

She writes: "If you are interested in the work of the Government's Biological Survey for our native birds, I'm sure you'll be interested in a 'want ad', just published. It reads: 'Wanted -- more volunteer observers of bird migration in the South and West. Address the U. S. Biological Survey, Washington, D. C.'"

"In other words, if you would like to take up a new and fascinating hobby and at the same time help Uncle Sam's study of our birds, here's your chance. Of course, to be a bird observer, you need to know birds -- that is, be able to identify the different species.

"The Survey men report that they already have plenty of bird observers east of the Mississippi River and north of the Ohio and Potomac Rivers, but not enough in the South and West. So they ask anyone in these two regions who is interested and can identify birds to write to the Biological Survey here in Washington for particulars. The many volunteer observers now helping in the study serve without pay because they enjoy this work as a hobby. Some of them make a game of keeping track of birds and especially of noting the arrival and departure of migratory species. Observers in some parts of the country who happen to be on important migration routes have listed more than 100 species a day.

"For half a century Biological Survey men have been collecting information on the migration of North American birds. The field men and their cooperators in the Survey have made observations at points all the way from the Arctic coast south to the pampas of Argentina. Then, hundreds of volunteer observers in this country and Canada have sent in reports each fall and spring of the migrations they have observed. To add to these facts, the Survey now has a large file of records of birds that have been banded and later recovered.

"Maybe you are wondering why this long and painstaking study. The answer is that the Government needs this information in order to make regulations to protect the birds. Research by Survey men and other scientists has proved beyond doubt that birds are one of our valuable natural resources, yet that many are in great danger of being lost to us. Survey studies show what a tremendous value our birds are to agriculture because of their constant warfare against insect pests and weeds. And they also show how our bird population, especially certain species, has been shrinking in late years as a result of draining marshes and lakes, cutting forests, hunting, and other activities of man.

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"So there are a few of the reasons for the study of birds and their migration. It will benefit the farmer, and also the sportsman who wants our game birds saved, and finally every citizen who enjoys the sound of a bird-song in the spring.

"One fact which these studies have brought to light is that many of our firmly rooted ideas about bird migration are incorrect. The theory, for example, which persisted from the days of Aristotle of ancient Greece to the last century, was that some birds hibernate in winter -- that they pass the cold season in a torpid state hidden in hollow trees, caves, or even the mud of marshes. We know now, of course, that when birds disappear for the season they have simply flown to another climate. And the Survey investigators believe that though various reasons for migration may exist, the main reason is food. When the birds' food supply begins to run low -- when the insects disappear, or snow and ice prevent the birds from reaching seeds or other food, then they start for other feeding grounds. The investigators say, too, that when days grow shorter and colder, so that birds have less hours of daylight to hunt for food yet need more food to keep warm, this doubtless has its effect on migration.

"Most people have the impression that fall and spring are the migration periods for all birds. As a matter of fact, the scientists find that migration is going on among some species during most of the year. Some birds begin their fall migrations early in July. For example, many shore birds start south in the early part of July. On the other hand, such birds as the goshawk and the snowy owl and others don't leave the North until severe weather and lack of food force them to do so. So observers in the northern part of this country have recorded an almost unbroken procession of birds southward from midsummer to winter, and noted some of the returning migrants coming north as early as the middle of February.

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"Then, people have an idea that all birds do their traveling by day. But the study shows that a large number of birds make their long flying trips by night. The majority of small birds fly by night. Food, again, is probably the reason. By traveling at night, the birds can devote the hours of daylight -- when they can see to feed -- to resting and feeding.

"Another misconception most people have is about the speed at which birds normally fly. Many rumors are abroad that birds migrate at the rate of a mile a minute. The investigators say that, though some birds can and do attain a speed even greater than this, such cases are exceptional. Few birds can develop an air speed of 60 miles an hour. But all birds have two speeds, one the normal rate for everyday purpose and also for migration and higher speed for escape or pursuit.

"But during migration most birds go at a leisurely pace, and, after a flight of a few hours, pause to feed and rest. This saves their strength and prevents the extreme fatigue that would come from great speed."

That concludes our Washington reporter's letter for this week.

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