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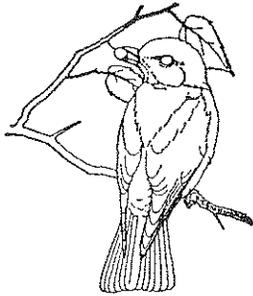
# BLUEBIRD



THE AUDUBON SOCIETY OF MISSOURI

Vol. 35, Nos. 2 and 3

Spring-Summer, 1968



# The Audubon Society of Missouri

Founded 1901

It is the purpose of the Audubon Society of Missouri to further conservation education in all its aspects with particular emphasis on wildlife. The Audubon Society of Missouri is dedicated to the proposition that only through education can a total conservation consciousness be insured and will constantly try to further this education at all levels.

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# THE BLUEBIRD

Volume 35

Nos. 2 and 3

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## Editor's Comments

In our national era of expanding technology and ever-increasing population, with so many forces threatening our natural world, any conservation group can easily get itself bogged in the swamp of too many urgent issues. Which conservation issue demands the most urgent priority? Which ones are honestly within the group's sphere of avowed interest and which ones should be left to the sphere of personal opinion? Upon which issue can the group really exert its influence most effectively?

The Audubon Society of Missouri membership, like that of all relatively small conservation groups, is confronted by such questions. When we focus on too many issues at once, our public image becomes as blurred as our own visions. It seems that right now — as good a time as ever — we would benefit by sighting our conservation convictions toward one single issue, a problem limited to our own state boundaries (though other states have the same problem) and yet so timely that our efforts might truly help to put an end to a great biological bungling. I am referring to the abolishment of the bounty system in Missouri.

Our State Department of Conservation has an excellent program of predator control, by extension trappers, to eliminate those occasional mammals which get their meals at the expense of farmers. Yet at the same time, the State and the counties continue to squander more than \$100,000 yearly of the taxpayers' monies in order to pay for the totally indiscriminate killing of coyotes and bobcats. In 1967 the amount paid for coyotes was \$119,920; for bobcats it was \$2,741.50. Ironically, this type of commercial killing has never done the job originally intended, for the bounty system has been in effect since 1909. The populations of coyotes and bobcats have their periodic ups and downs in spite of the bounty system, and they have not nearly succumbed to the bounty hunters, thank goodness.

Our membership needs a challenging issue to bolster its avowed purposes and give it momentum. I propose a campaign against the bounty system in Missouri, one to be launched at the 1968 Annual Meeting.

*NOTE: Anyone wishing specific information on this matter should write to Mr. Charles Lann, Bounty Information Service, Stephens College Post Office, Columbia, Mo. 65201.*

# ANNUAL MEETING

The Audubon Society of Missouri

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Camp Rising Sun

Lake of the Ozarks State Park

OCTOBER 5 AND 6, 1968

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Costs will be \$7.50 per adult and \$3.50 per child under twelve. No meals will be served Friday but breakfast will be available Saturday morning for \$.75 extra. Both adult and youth nature exhibits are encouraged. Though not absolutely essential, reservations should be sent to Mr. Lisle Jeffrey, 1845 Cliff Drive, Columbia, Missouri 65201.

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## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Slides and commentary on Isle Royale National Park, by Lee and Edward Mason of St. Louis.

Illustrated presentation by Mr. Gene Poirot, farmer and nationally recognized conservationist from Golden City, Missouri.

THE BLUEBIRD is the official publication of the Audubon Society of Missouri. Articles, essays and reports on all phases of natural history and conservation are welcomed and will be printed within limits of space available. Manuscripts should be typed, double-space, on one side of 8½x11 paper. Illustrations should be in the form of glossy prints, 5x7 or larger, or as original drawings. Send articles and other correspondence to the editor: James P. Jackson, 105 Terry Lane, Washington, Mo. 63090.

# WINTER SURVEY

December 1st through February 29th

Compiled by John L. Hamilton

R. R. 2 Huntoon Road, St. Joseph, Missouri 64505

It seems that a combination of unfortunate weather conditions and an unusual abundance of food supply (both in the state and more importantly, north of it) contributed to Missouri's 1967-68 winter season's being one of the most unproductive in memory — both for number of species and individual number of birds sighted. The weather, for its part, was generally cool and dry to the end of December which for this period favored the delay of a number of waterfowl, waders and occasional shorebirds on their southward movement. It is surmised that this mild period likewise held up many of our normal winter invaders from the north and food abundance there apparently kept these species from moving into the state when a sudden cold snap swept across the entire area on the last of December. This unusually cold weather pattern produced record low temperatures across the state for approximately two weeks, effectively driving the waterfowl population before it (except some divers, especially in the St. Louis area) and freezing all but a few rivers and running streams. Milder weather then returned in mid-January and persisted almost uninterrupted through February, but the winter finches, waxwings, red-breasted nuthatches, etc. failed to appear to fill the gap. Food for the seed eaters was available in at least normal quantities through most of the area (for instance, birds netted and banded by the Diggs' in extreme Northwest Missouri proved to be in exceptionally good condition, indicating that plenty of food was available), but all too often few migrants arrived to take advantage of it. An exception was the St. Louis area where sparrows and juncos were abundant.

*Loons through herons*—Open water lasting unusually late into the winter season throughout the state resulted in the unusual sighting of three common loons on Christmas count at Springfield on December 23rd (I.N.F.) and the continued presence at Browning Lake near St. Joseph of a single horned grebe, evidently unable to fly, as late as December 30th (J.L.H.). An unusual concentration of some 26 horned grebes in company with pied-billed grebes and a number of diving ducks was reported late in the winter season on February 3rd at Gravois Mills, Lake of the Ozarks (D.E.). Pied-billed grebes, which often linger if weather permits, were observed in seven Missouri locations in December, with a high count of 42 individuals reported from Mingo National Wildlife Refuge on December 27th (J.H.).

One of a flock of some 45 white pelicans which arrived in this same area on October 9th persisted as late as December 1st, barely making it into the winter period (J.E.T.) while another, probably a cripple, lingered at Squaw Creek and was last observed on December 10th (J.L.H.). The most surprising report of waders made for the period was of 29 great blue herons on December 30th at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois.

*Waterfowl*—Only two whistling swan observations were made for the period — one on December 29th and the other on February 27th, both of

lone birds at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge (J.E.T.).

Canada geese were listed frequently throughout the state for the period and the wintering population of 16,000 reached in January at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge established a new record for that locale (J.E.T.). The low population of Canadas at Squaw Creek reached approximately 3,000 birds and rose to some 9,500 at the end of February (H.B.). Flocks numbering about 10,000 individuals were observed at Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Sumner, Missouri, on February 3rd (R.M.L.). White-fronted geese were reported both early and late in the period from Squaw Creek where one was seen the week of December 17th and two more were found to have returned by the end of February (H.B.). An unusual sighting for this species was made on December 27th at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge where white-fronts are considered rare (J.E.T.). As might be expected, the open December weather permitted large numbers of snow and blue geese to remain in the area until the end of the month. A high count was reported at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, on December 30th where approximately 2,500 snow geese and 9,500 blue geese were reported (S.S.V.). These species then disappeared with the subsequent cold wave, but built back up to numbers of approximately 40,000 snow geese and 20,000 blue geese at Squaw Creek by the end of February (H.B.).

As always, mallards constituted the great bulk of the wintering duck population in the state and their numbers varied directly with the weather pattern. A good example was at Squaw Creek where an estimated population of over 155,000 mallards was present the first of December, dropping after the cold wave to no birds at all during the first part of January and then rebounding to some 100,000 individuals the second week in February (H.B.). Black ducks in unusual numbers were reported on Christmas count December 30th at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, where 459 were estimated (S.S.V.). Gadwall were observed on the same count (S.S.V.) and between December 12th and 30th at Shawnee, Kansas (E. & D.C.). Two blue-winged teal and five wood ducks were found lingering at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, on Christmas count December 30th (S.S.V.) but other dabbling ducks were reported sparingly throughout the state for the period, especially after December 31st.

Most species of diving ducks were present in normal to below normal numbers. Among the more interesting were Katherine Arhos' record of an old-squaw at Portage De Sioux on the Mississippi River on January 20th, and a white-winged scoter seen at the same location on January 7th (D.A.), with two more of this species reported there January 20th by Katherine Arhos, fide J.E.C. An unusually late observation of six hooded mergansers was made at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, on December 30th (S.S.V.) and one was seen in the Shawnee Mission, Kansas, area the same date on Christmas count (E. & D.C.). The high count for common mergansers occurred at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, where 1,059 were estimated on December 30th (S.S.V.), while the only red-breasted merganser report was received from the Shawnee Mission, Kansas, area where three were observed on December 30th (E. & D.C.).

*Vultures through terns*—The only vulture sightings reported for the state for the winter period were made at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge where nine turkey vultures and ten black vultures were seen on Christmas

count December 27th (J.H.). Most species of hawks were reported up in numbers at St. Louis (D.A.) and by an encouraging number of observers over the rest of the state. An unusual record was one goshawk reported January 1st just north of Kansas City on that area's Christmas count compiled by Felicia Bart. Among the buteos, rough-legged hawks were singled out by several observers as being particularly prevalent with a high count of 21 being made on Squaw Creek on December 31st (H.B.). Three rough-legs also were seen in one tree on January 20th near St. Louis (D.A.).

Golden Eagles were reported for several areas, notably from Mingo National Wildlife Refuge where two were seen on December 18th (J.E.T.) with one of these being reported nine days later on Christmas count (J.H.) and at least one lingering until January 24th (J.E.T.). Another was reported at Squaw Creek December 2nd (H.B.) and a lone immature was observed at Alton Dam on January 11th by Katherine Arhos, fide J.E.C. The St. Louis Audubon bald eagle count held this year on February 17th yielded one last golden eagle observed on the Illinois side (S.S.V.) plus an encouraging count of some 239 bald eagles for the area. Bald eagles, incidentally, were reported in widely varying numbers from many areas around the state and despite somewhat local fluctuations, (for instance only 27 recorded at Squaw Creek on the December 31st Christmas count, while 112 were estimated at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, on Christmas count there the day before) seemed to total a relatively high population.

Falcons were represented for the winter period with a peregrine report from Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, on December 30th (S.S.V.), and a pigeon hawk sighted at Montrose Lake Wildlife area on Christmas count the same day by J. F. Belshe.

Turkeys were recorded as common for Adair County around Kirksville (R.M.L.) and three were observed on Christmas count at Mingo on December 27th (J.H.), making the second straight year this species has been found on the count there.

Open water around the state through the end of December resulted in an unusually high number of American coot reports on Christmas counts. The largest concentration reported was at Springfield, Missouri, where 168 were seen on December 23rd (I.N.F.) and a surprising 27 were observed in the Shawnee Mission, Kansas, area on December 30th (E. & D.C.). As is usual, a few hardy killdeer and common snipe lingered throughout the area through December and one killdeer and two snipe were still present at Grafton, Illinois, between January 1st and 6th during sub-zero weather (S.S.V.). The most unusual shorebird report for the period, however, was from Mingo National Wildlife Refuge where a least sandpiper was carefully observed at close range on Christmas count December 27th (J.H.). Even more exceptional, however, were the remarkable gull sightings made during February in the Alton Dam area. Among these were glaucous gull, observed at Portage De Sioux on February 29th (J.E.C.), Iceland gull in the same area on February 15th (Katherine Arhos & S.S.V.) and two Iceland gulls, a mature and a first-year bird, above Alton Dam on February 22nd (S.S.V., fide J.E.C.). A single adult great black-backed gull was also observed on February 15th and 16th at Alton Dam (S.S.V., fide J.E.C.). For the second winter in a row a black-legged kittiwake was found at Alton Lake near the dam (Katherine Arhos and Helen Hill, fide J.E.C.). February 8th was the date of this first sighting,

but the bird was seen later on the 11th, 15th, 22nd, etc. by many observers. Bonaparte's gull, virtually the only gull possibility not reported from the St. Louis area, was discovered on Table Rock Lake during January by Bob Bright, fide I.N.F.

*Doves through crows*—Mourning dove concentrations of from 75 to 100 birds were reported almost daily during January and February in and around a wooded area along a running creek in northwest Missouri just south of Hamburg, Iowa (H. & F.D.). Dove reports from elsewhere around the state were scanty, as usual, during the winter period. The only roadrunner sightings reported were three (dates unknown) at Ozark (I.N.F.).

Owl reports appeared well above average for most species, highlighted by a snowy owl invasion that produced sightings of these northern wanderers in several areas. Most surprising was the snowy discovered December 23rd in St. Charles County, Missouri, which constituted only the second modern record of this species for the St. Louis area (S.S.V., fide J.E.C.). This bird was seen on into the month of January. Another snowy owl report came from northwest Missouri near Bigelow on December 9th, John Hague, fide F.L., and a third from just south of Hamburg, Iowa (on the Missouri side), where two individuals were observed on February 23rd (H. & F.D.). It was further reported that two birds, perhaps these same individuals, stayed all winter near the farm home of Mrs. Harold Phillips who lives in the area. The only barn owl sighting for the period came from St. Louis where one was seen in January (D.A.). Long-eared owl individuals were reported from Squaw Creek between January 1st and the end of the period (H.B.), as well as from Gray Summit, Missouri, where one was observed on Christmas count December 26th by Donald Hayes. Short-eared owls were unquestionably up in number all over the state, especially at St. Louis where 30 or more short-ears were reported from St. Charles County in late January by Mildred Schaefer, fide J.E.C. Saw-whet owls were seen again this winter at Squaw Creek where a pair was present from the first part of January through the end of the period (H.B.).

Reports of relative abundance of woodpeckers range from below normal at Springfield (I.N.F.) to above normal at Camp Towanyak, Johnson County, Kansas, (M.L.M.) and St. Louis (D.A.). Red-headed woodpeckers were especially prevalent in the latter area, as well as at Kirksville where they were the predominant species through the winter (R.M.L.). Counts of yellow-shafted flickers ranged downward from a remarkable 148 individuals estimated during Christmas count on December 30th at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, (S.S.V.) but for the first time in many years red-shafted flickers went unreported for the state for the period. Seven northern horned larks were reported near St. Joseph on January 7th (F.L.).

Without question the surprise among the Corvidae was the sighting of three fish crows on the Christmas count held December 20th at Big Oak Tree State Park (J.H.). These birds were heard calling at close range and the observation should provide at least a partial answer to the question of whether this species is a permanent resident of the state.

*Chickadees through weaver finches*—The scarcity of red-breasted nuthatches noted for the fall season continued almost unabated throughout the winter months with the only sightings recorded for the state being that made

of a single individual at Trimble Wildlife Area on the Christmas count held December 30th, compiled by Dean Rising. Brown creepers continued in normal numbers in all areas reported, however, and a surprising record of two house wrens was reported for the Christmas count held at Montrose Lake Wildlife Area on December 30th, compiled by J. F. Belshe. Winter wren sightings were normal for northwest Missouri with this species being found on three Christmas counts in the area, namely at Trimble Waterfowl Area where three were located on December 30th (Dean Rising); one at St. Joseph seen the same day (J.L.H.) and one just north of Kansas City observed January 1st on the count compiled by Felicia Bart. The only other report was for St. Louis where one was seen in January (D.A.). Two early Bewick's wrens were reported at Gravois Mills, Lake of the Ozarks on February 3rd (D.E.). Carolina wrens continued their comeback and were reported in good numbers by all reporters who mentioned them.

Mockingbirds wintered in normal numbers and hardy brown thrashers were observed on Christmas counts in the Shawnee Mission, Kansas, area on December 30th (E. & D.C.), and at Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, on the same date (S.S.V.). Even more surprising was a catbird reported on Christmas count at Montrose Lake Wildlife Area on December 30th, compiled by J. F. Belshe. Robins and bluebirds occurred in normal numbers through most of the state during the winter months and large numbers of returning robins were noted near Kirksville in Adair County on February 25th (R.M.L.). The lone hermit thrush record for the season was made on Christmas count at Mingo December 27th (J.H.).

An unusual record of 13 water pipits was recorded in Franklin County, Missouri, near St. Louis by Jack and Don Hayes, fide J.E.C., in early January. Loggerhead shrikes were considered more numerous than usual by all reporters who mentioned them, but myrtle warblers were scarce at St. Joseph in December and virtually non-existent after the hard freeze the end of the month (F.L., J.L.H.).

Eighty-four European tree sparrows were reported on the Christmas count held December 23rd at Orchard Farm (J.E.C.), and another 45 were estimated at Pere Marquette State Park on December 30th (S.S.V.).

*Bobolinks through sparrows*—As usual, western meadowlarks were the dominant member of the family during the winter season in western Missouri and one was even reported on January 20th singing at Portage De Sioux on the Mississippi River (Katherine Arhos, fide J.E.C.). For the fourth straight year an enormous blackbird roost was reported at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge (J.E.T.). This year the population was even greater than usual, being estimated at some 5,000,000 to 6,000,000 birds, consisting mainly of common grackles and red-winged blackbirds. The high count of rusty blackbirds for the period came from Big Oak Tree State Park where 100 were estimated on Christmas count December 30th (J.H.). Cardinals were reported unusually abundant by a number of observers and 549, for instance, were recorded on Christmas count at Pere Marquette State Park on December 30th (S.S.V.), reflecting the excellent coverage on this count. Forty-three cardinals in the yard at one time were counted at Camp Towanyak in Johnson County, Kansas (M.L.M.).

Purple finches were reported as missing entirely at Camp Towanyak

(M.L.M.), Columbia (E.B.E.), St. Louis (D.A.), but 13 were seen on Christmas count at Gray Summit, Missouri, on December 26th with four more observed at Springfield, Missouri, on December 23rd and another six at St. Joseph on February 25th (F.L.). Common redpolls, as well as both species of crossbills, went unreported for the season and pine siskins were scarce, being observed only at St. Louis in early January (D.A.), Gray Summit, Missouri, on December 26th (Don Hayes), Shawnee Mission, Kansas, on December 30th (E. & D.C.) and St. Joseph December 3rd (F.L.) and December 23rd and February 17th (J.L.H.).

Sparrow reports varied greatly around the state and the most unusual records were compiled by J. F. Belshe on the Christmas count held December 30th at Montrose Lake Wildlife Area where two Le Conte's sparrows and two vesper sparrows were observed. As is usual, a light sprinkling of Oregon juncos was reported, the most easterly being a single bird observed at a feeder in St. Louis on January 1st (Mitzi Anderson, fide J.E.C.). Doubtless encouraged by the mild December weather, field sparrows appeared on an unusual number of Christmas counts, but the normally abundant tree sparrows presented a spotty pattern, ranging from numbers near their usual concentrations in some areas to none at all on the Christmas count held December 26th at Gray Summit, Missouri (Donald Hayes). In northwest Missouri just south of Hamburg, Iowa, a Harris' sparrow banded in November of 1963 was trapped again in the same area in which the band was applied (H. & F.D.).

D. A.—Dick Anderson  
H. B.—Harold Burgess  
E. & D. C.—Elizabeth & Dean Cole  
J. E. C.—Earl Comfort  
H. & F. D.—Hazel & Fitzhugh Diggs  
D. E.—Dave Easterla  
E. B. E.—Mrs. Ezra B. Entrikin  
I. N. F.—Nathan Fay

J. L. H.—John L. Hamilton  
J. H.—Jim Haw  
F. L.—Floyd Lawhon  
R. M. L.—Robert M. Luker  
M. L. M.—Mary Louise Myers  
J. E. T.—John E. Toll  
S. S. V.—Sarah S. Vasse

## The Occasional Bluebird — A Postscript

When your present editor took over responsibility for *The BLUEBIRD*, some four years ago, it had enjoyed a consistent status as a quarterly publication. James F. Comfort had done an excellent job of editing for over ten years.

Since then *The BLUEBIRD* had to be cut to two issues per year, though each one was enlarged to serve as a double issue. Members may recall that the reason for cutting issues was to allow temporary respite from a financial pinch. The Society had a membership of fewer than five-hundred members and the per copy cost of our publication, which due to the high cost of type-setting always varies inversely to its total numbers, was going over fifty cents per copy. The ideal solution was to raise membership dues to relieve our financial pinch, which we did, and then to increase our membership, *which we did not*. Nevertheless, we did improve our financial position to the point where at last year's Annual Meeting, we agreed to reinstate the quarterly status of *The BLUEBIRD*.

Our old problem of unduly high cost per copy still hangs on, of course, and now your editor has another hang up: he is not getting enough written material and what he does get is hardly in time to be of seasonal interest at the time of printing.

Your present editor is no doubt partly to blame for the occasional nature of *The BLUEBIRD* and he feels he should yield his services to someone who might do a more effective job; he would also like to yield his services because of personal reasons, namely the pressure of other commitments. As a postscript he would like to offer the following suggestions to the future editor, whoever that might be:

- 1 — Always keep nudging potential contributors for, like everyone else, they are busy and tend to forget their good intentions.
- 2 — Work with a printer located close enough that business can be transacted on a personal basis and not by the tedious and delaying method of using the mails.
- 3 — Find someone who can make occasional line drawings to spruce up the pages — your present editor failed on this one.
- 4 — Repeat number one — your present editor apparently did not do so well on this one either.