

ORNITHOLOGY
NATURE RAMBLINGS
by Frank Thone



South for the Winter

➤ USUALLY, when we talk of birds going south for the winter, we think of their leaving northern lands that will soon be frostbound and seeking warm, sunny regions until spring shall send them north again. This is the migration of bluebird and oriole, of duck and goose; the pattern

is so prevalent that we are prone to think of it as exclusive.

Yet birds are all about, in winter; even the least observant of us sees and hears them. Their presence is apt to be explained by an easy, "Oh, they stick around the whole year."

This is by no means necessarily the case, and of some birds it is not true at all. Whole populations of birds that are seen in the northern states during the snowy season disappear or become pretty scarce in summer; nuthatch and brown creeper, for example, and that mighty hunter of mice, the great horned owl. Most such birds nest in Canada, though in some species the summer breeding range does extend down into the United States a little.

In some cases, too, we apply the permanent-resident explanation to a bird species because we see representatives around practically all the time, and assume they are the same individuals. However, what we are likely to have is an overlapping of two migrant populations that do not go very far. Crows that we see in summer are very apt to flap southward a few hundreds, or perhaps only a few scores, of miles to their winter range. In the meantime their place in our landscape is taken by other crows from a little farther north. And since all crows look alike to us, we assume that no migration at all has taken place.

The European starling, a recently introduced species that has become a spreading pest, has developed this limited and overlapping migration to a marked degree. The starling flocks that are wholly undesired feature of downtown Washington, D. C., in winter are migrants from western New York and Pennsylvania. The Capital's summer starling population in the meantime is spending the winter as uninvited guests of communities in North Carolina and southern Virginia.

Occasionally, of course, you will see or hear of a normally migrating bird that hasn't bothered to migrate at all. Robins that remain through winter, sometimes consorting with flocks of rowdy sparrows, are among the most frequently reported of such cases. This probably represents a response to easily available handouts of food, rendering the southward trip unnecessary.

Science News Letter, November 27, 1948

cloud feature which is then tracked for a minute or so. During this period of tracking, one of the indexing arms remains fixed on the scale and the other moves.

At the end of the tracking period the vertical distance between plane and cloud may be computed from the air speed, time of tracking and the difference in scale readings at the two arms. The actual cloud height above the earth is this distance added to or subtracted from the reading on the plane's altitude instrument, depending on whether the cloud is above or below the aircraft.

Science News Letter, November 27, 1948

PUBLIC HEALTH

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