

# Carolina Birds and Birders

. . . with Willie Morrison

## Finding Birds and Plants with the Mellingers

PAUL A. STEWART

From the sill of the window of their bedroom the Whip-poor-will bids them goodnight and greets them on their morning awakening; the Pileated Woodpecker exchanges gratitude with them as they jointly partake of their meals on opposite sides of their kitchen window; the Swainson's Warbler delivers his territorial song almost within ear range from their front porch, challenging them to try to find his nest in the rhododendron thicket. Upon his retirement from the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 1968, E.O. (Mel) Mellinger and his wife, Marie, chose to become neighbors of these willing birds in Rabun County, Georgia, just outside the Chattahoochee National Forest. Here they found contact with nature much more intimate than the contact found by so many people only through their television sets. Twenty species of bird visitors have been recorded at their feeders, visitors required to yield only their photographs.

In Rabun County the Appalachian folds have pushed skyward to form the Blue Ridge, with Rabun Bald at 4,676 feet above sea level being the second highest peak in the Georgia portion of the Appalachians. Here Mel and Marie can see certain natural features of their native Ohio and Wisconsin, respectively, in only short walks from their home. Here many northern birds reach the southern limits of their breeding range. The Mellingers' list of nesting warblers found in Rabun County contains 22 species, including the following: Black-and-white, Swainson's, Worm-eating, Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Parula, Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Yellow-throated, Chestnut-sided, Pine, Prairie, Kentucky, Hooded, and Canada. Also included are the Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, and American Redstart. Other northern birds nesting in Rabun County include the Broad-winged Hawk, Common Raven, Veery, and Solitary Vireo.

And no less than the birds, the trees and plants invite the naturalist to see their disjunct islands in Rabun County. Here the Georgia Botanical Society makes annual pilgrimages for the privilege of treading on high trails through hemlock forests over moss-covered rocks. Here the Moccasin Flowers and Showy Orchis grow in all of their splendor.

Similar to a Cottontail's network of trails through his brier patch, the forest across the road from the Mellinger home is crisscrossed with well-worn trails, unmistakable signs of the presence of a forest creature in adjustment with his environment. Here Mel in 1971 for his third successive year made for publication in *American Birds* (formerly *Audubon Field Notes*) a breeding bird census of a 15-acre block of mountain forest. Here the minimum requirements for a breeding bird census are being substantially exceeded.

Having found her place in the ecosystem, Marie pursues an active program of helping other people to a similar discovery. As Park Naturalist she serves the Georgia Department of State Parks in conducting nature hikes and in presenting slide programs at Tugaloo

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and Black Rock State Parks. In addition, Marie is the current president of the Georgia Botanical Society and a past president of the Georgia Ornithological Society.

Truly, the Carolina Bird Club is fortunate that Marie has seen fit to crowd into her busy schedule the preparation of the Conservation section of *The Chat*. However, coming from her abundance of living as Marie's conducting of this Conservation section does, actual preparation of the material is undoubtedly much less of a chore for her than it would be for a more normal and lesser spirit. From her busy typewriter unnumbered manuscripts on nature continue to flow to grace the pages of *Castanea*, *South Carolina Magazine*, *South Carolina Wildlife*, *Virginia Wildlife*, and *National Parks* on subjects from fungi to Bobwhite foods, all illustrated by Mel. And when in the Mellinger's secret ravine I looked at the thriving Oconee Bells, a rare plant which had been rescued from advancing dam flood waters, I could see that we can read a message coming from feeling as well as knowing.

With Marie as chairwoman, the Mellingers are working on a committee of the Georgia Conservancy making a biological survey of the Chattahoochee National Forest. This project was organized in November 1969, and it is the committee's goal to preserve wilderness areas and stop encroachments of roads and other similar developments.

Indeed, the Mellingers can make enviable lists of the birds and plants to be found near their home, and they can assure their naturalist visitors of being able to see birds and plants to support his or her fondest expectations. But more than that, the Mellingers have captured for themselves and can impart to others much of the spirit of that great philosopher from Walden Pond: they travel a great deal when sitting on their front porch. Without the details being specifically stated, one can see with them beyond the names to the purposes of the birds and plants. Even as I sat there with them I could hear the whisper of the nearby trees telling of the Mellingers' oneness of ecological purpose with them.

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### White Birds Outdraw Golf at Hampton Club

The possibility two baby albino Loggerhead Shrikes are being raised on the golf course has the Hampton County Country Club in an uproar.

Hampton golfers now are talking about the all-white birds, not one-under-par, when they discuss birdies. They don't yell fore, but they do yell two, when the birds are spotted between Holes 17 and 18, and golfers lay their clubs aside long enough to watch the unusual birds.

The young birds are friendly and allow golf carts to roll up for close observation. Golf course manager Buddy Pulaski was able to show them to a Hampton bird enthusiast, Don Parker, who tentatively identified them.

Local birdwatchers have been keeping vigil in the late afternoons when the parent birds fly in to feed the young. The parent birds have been definitely identified as Loggerhead Shrikes. The young were apparently hatched in a nest in a hedgerow by the country club fairway.

The young birds are approximately seven inches long, sparsely feathered around the neck and have beady black eyes. They are solid white, shaped like a Mockingbird, with slimmer, shorter tail and flatter head.—MARTHA BEE ANDERSON, Hampton, S.C.

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: SANDERLING

During the autumn migration of 1971, the Long Point Bird Observatory hopes to band and colour-mark several hundred Sanderling at Long Point, Ontario. Information on the movement of these birds away from Long Point will facilitate research presently underway on the energy requirements of their migration. We would appreciate it if everyone sighting these birds would report their observations to:

Long Point Bird Observatory,  
269 Beta Street,  
Toronto 14, Ontario, Canada.

The following information would be appreciated:

Date and time of observation

Location, including nearest city or town

Colours: note—birds will be coloured on the breast and the abdomen with two of the following colours: red, orange, pink, purple, yellow, green, blue, brown, black, and white (no colour).

Leg that has been banded: this will tell if the bird is an adult or an immature.

Any other information on what other birds are with the marked individuals would be very useful.

## HERONRY LOCATIONS REQUESTED

At the top of the aquatic food-chain, the Great Blue Heron may well be an important indicator species. The Laboratory of Ornithology is planning a nation-wide survey of this species.

The first step will be to compile an inventory of heronries. To this end, we appeal to all readers with knowledge on this point to write to us. Information may be recent or old; detailed or sketchy. Even "I remember seeing a heronry as a boy" is helpful if the site is remembered well enough to locate on a topographic map.

We hope that this inventory will contain the exact locality of the heronry, a general description of the site, and as much history as possible. We hope that this stage of the program can be completed by the winter so that arrangements can be made for census work in the 1972 breeding season.

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