

BOOK REVIEWS

BIRD LIFE OF NORTH CAROLINA'S SHINING ROCK WILDERNESS

Marcus B. Simpson, Jr. Occasional Papers of the North Carolina Biological Survey and the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences. 1994-1. Paper. 32 pp. \$5.00.

The Shining Rock Wilderness, located about 25 miles southwest of Asheville, NC was once the most extensive stand of spruce-fir forests in the southern Appalachians. During the first quarter of this century it was extensively logged and then burned in a series of fires. It was established as a wilderness tract in 1964 and is the subject of Mark Simpson's latest contribution to the knowledge of birds in the mountainous region of North Carolina.

Given the extensive changes to the plant communities and the apparent damage to the soils caused by the fires, it is not surprising that Simpson has documented a number of substantial changes in the composition of the bird communities in the wilderness area compared with nearby areas such as the Great Smoky Mountains, Plott Balsam Mountains, Unicoi Mountains, or Grandfather Mountain. Most obvious is the great reduction of breeding populations of species normally associated with mature spruce-fir forests such as Black-capped Chickadees, Olive-sided Flycatchers, and Northern Saw-whet Owls. Similar reductions can be seen in populations of Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Blackburnian Warbler. In contrast, other populations more closely associated with sub-climax vegetative communities or understories, such as Winter Wren, Gray Catbird, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Canada Warbler, Rufous-sided Towhee, Veery, Solitary Vireo, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing and Dark-eyed Junco are maintaining or even increasing in numbers. Finally, the birds of the "edges" or early successional stages, such as Common Yellowthroat, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Indigo Bunting and Brown Thrasher are doing very well in the Shining Rock area compared with other areas of high elevation in the southern Blue Ridge Mountains.

While most serious bird watchers will not be surprised that changes in plant communities seem to cause changes in the abundance of bird communities, what may be surprising is the length of time over which such effects can be detected. The area has been a protected Wilderness Area for thirty years, and the logging and fires have not occurred for nearly seventy years, but the former natural communities have not yet been reestablished. For those with even a passing interest in the birds of the mountains of North and South Carolina and any interest at all in issues of conservation, I recommend this publication as "must" reading.—H. T. Hendrickson