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24 March, 1975
Business + Professional Women
Dinner Meeting.

Bird Watching in Southeast Kansas

Who watches birds?

A cross section of the educated public. Housewives probably lead the list, but also bankers, clerks, doctors, farmers, bus drivers, teachers, lawyers, musicians, undertakers, etc.

Why watch birds?

A few professionals - professors, museum curators, institute investigators, biologists, etc.
Mostly avocational, for entertainment + diversion.

Why birds? (instead of magazines, TV watching, etc.)

"Call of the wild" - a primitive contact with nature.

Relatively showy in both color and song - conspicuous.

Considerable variety - 250+ around Pittsburg, 700+ in the U.S. Not so limited (30+) nor secretive

as mammals, reptiles + amphibians, nor as numerous

and confusing as insects and wild planes. Some-

what similar in numbers as fish, but more

widely distributed and visible. Bird watching

and fishing tend to exclude each other.

Advantages in bird watching.

Both visual and audial - the only group high for both.

Relatively few similar and confusing species.

Excellent field guides available, usable without

having a specimen in the hand (or on a hook).

The "Peterson System."

Ernest Thompson Seton noted how certain species

could be recognized quickly by a specific mark.

A.A. Allen (Cornell) listed such marks for many species.

Peterson, a "student" of Allen (and others) had a knack for sketching, and made illustrations of many species showing specifically the marks to be looked for, as listed by Allen. This led to the project of separating all birds of the eastern U.S. by this method, including the listing of other traits of song or habit not well shown by the drawings. This was compiled suitable for a small condensed volume one could carry in a pocket. But several publishers were not interested - as there were too many illustrations, and anyway the market already had too many bird books, - from the big Audubon Society sponsored "Birds of America" to the little Reed pocket books with all colored illustrations. Finally Peterson's manuscript came to the attention of the publisher of the Houghton Mifflin Co. of Boston - a very able bird watcher himself, as were many persons in the Boston area. He recognized the unique value of Peterson's work, deciding at once to publish it. The first printing was immediately sold out ^{in 1934} and it has been reprinted ever since, ~~1934~~ going thru two further revisions, the last very much in need of revision again. One of the best investments Houghton-Mifflin ever made. Some 20 additional volumes in the Peterson series now printed, the "Birds of New Zealand" one of the latest.