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EASTERN SONGSTERS MOVING WEST

by

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"Go West, young man, for more open spaces and bigger opportunities," is one of the old sayings which led many men to leave the eastern centers of population and migrate toward the Pacific Coast. One can scarcely compare different varieties of bird life to people, yet during the past fifty years there has been a definite trend of some of the eastern songsters to move out and settle in Oregon.

The bobolink is one of the most remarkable songsters of the eastern states. Its summer home is from New Jersey to Nova Scotia and westward. During this season, eastern fields and meadows echo with the outbursting ecstasy of the bobolink. It is a flood of melody. When summer ends, the black, white, and buff coat of the male is shed and he dons the plain brown dress of the female. They travel South and East under the assumed name of Reed-bird or Rice-bird. They visit the cultivated rice fields in the South when the crops are ripening. They fatten on the rice diet and are then ready for the long flight across the Gulf of Mexico to spend the winter south of the Amazon.

Years ago, the western breeding records of this wonderful song bird were to Utah and Montana. Then gradually the bobolinks moved further West and on through Idaho to eastern Oregon. Thirty years ago, we saw them nesting and heard them singing in the Harney Valley around Burns. They are now found in Union County and in some parts of eastern Washington. Will they later move on to the Willamette Valley?

If Oregon is luring more people to come from the eastern

states, the reason is that it must be a better place to live. What else has brought the catbird from the East and middle West on into Oregon? The earliest explorers and many pioneers followed down the Columbia River. The catbird did the same. In 1915 Stanley Jewett saw the first pioneer catbirds in the northeastern part of Oregon. Later on, we saw them nesting in the bushes along the Umatilla River, and today one may find them as far west as Willow Creek below Hepner. The newcomers are moving on toward the Pacific.

It is a mewing call that gave the catbird its name. It sings a mixture of fine phrases and harsh notes. It is totally different in color from the Oregon towhee, a bird that has been called catbird by some people because it, too, has a cat-like call, and because it likes a tangle of bushes along a stream.

The eastern catbird is inclined to be friendly with people. Where he is well treated, he likes to live near a home, coming around the door steps and answering to a call, as well as singing for entertainment. He is always spreading his tail, jerking his body about, now crouching like a cat ready to spring, then straightening himself up very tall. He is a distinct personality in birdland, and is now a permanent Oregon resident.

The group of warblers that lives in America is the second largest of the bird families. For some reason, a large variety of these song birds lives and migrates through the Atlantic states more than along the Pacific Coast. They are birds of beautiful plumage and attractive song. They play an important part in destroying insect life, and for this reason are a direct benefit to agriculture.

The American redstart with its coal-black head and flame colored shoulders is an attractive warbler that has been moving on

into the Pacific Northwest. Over twenty years ago, Stanley Jewett discovered the first of these birds along Powder River in eastern Oregon. Now one may find them in Wallowa, Baker, and Union Counties. This bird goes about its work with drooping wings, its long fan-tail opening and shutting to show its bright color patches as it flashes about tumbling through the air after insects.

The vireos are small attractive birds like the warblers. The Latin word vireo means, "I am green." They are sometimes called greenlets on account of the olive-green plumage. The two resident vireos that nest in the woods around Portland are the Cassin and Western-Warbling. They have a beautiful song, repeating the same warbling phrases over and over a thousand times a day. Their nests are little baskets tied to the crotches of little limbs. They resemble the hanging nests of the orioles except they are not as long nor as deep.

The vireos, numbering about fifty species, are peculiar to America, most of them being confined to Central and South America. About fifteen species inhabit the United States. The red-eyed vireo is the most common bird of the East, but for some reason he has been moving on into the West. He was found first as far north as British Columbia, then moved south into Washington, and at the present time is a resident along the Columbia River and in the northern part of Oregon.

It is quite clear that many of our song birds have followed the trend of human migrations, and for the same reasons. In the early days when the Pacific Northwest was a vast wilderness area, certain song birds did not inhabit this part of the country.

As the farmers gradually moved in and cultivated the land, raising more berries, vegetables and fruits, it became a more attractive region to the birds. At the same time, there was a change and increase in insect life. This condition also lured in more insect-eating birds. The lark bunting is a typical resident of the middle West. It is a striking black and white dweller of the prairies. It has been gradually moving more to the West and is now common through eastern Idaho, and may later become a resident of eastern Oregon and Washington.

The change in habitat of bird life, ^{applies} not only to song and insectivorous birds, but also an occasional species of shore or wading bird. The upland plover was once a common bird of the eastern states. At one time, it was a favorite of the sportsman. Excessive shooting and the destruction of its nests in cultivated areas reduced it almost to extermination. It was then given protection under the federal law. A few years ago some of these upland plovers, formerly abundant in the East, were discovered on some of the large stock ranches in the mountain valleys of Umatilla and Grant Counties in eastern Oregon.