

**THE BIRDS OF
SPRINGFIELD
AND VICINITY**

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The Birds of Springfield and Vicinity by Robert O. Morris

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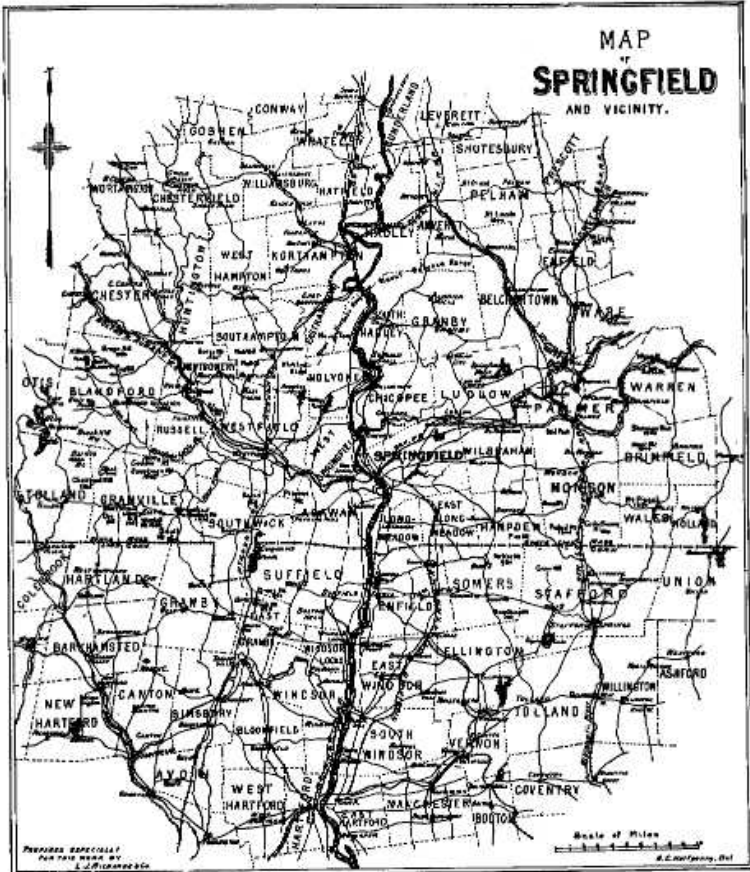
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ROBERT O. MORRIS

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MAP
of
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BY
ROBERT O. MORRIS

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SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

The Birds of Springfield and Vicinity.

The Hydrographic valley of the Connecticut at Springfield is about sixty miles wide, and the river here is somewhat east of the center of the basin. The State of Connecticut lies three and a half miles south of Springfield, the town of Longmeadow intervening. Thirteen miles to the west, a mountain range rises abruptly from the level land at Westfield, continuing beyond to the Housatonic Valley, forming a portion of the so-called Berkshire hills, and running north until it joins the Green mountains in Vermont. The highest point of this range in Hampden County is "Round Top" in Chester, which reaches an altitude of 1800 feet. About ten miles to the east of Springfield lies a range of considerably less height, which is locally called the "Wilbraham Hills," and extends north to New Hampshire, where it merges into the White mountain range. Five miles to the west of Springfield is a series of Hills, 400 to 900 feet in height, of trap rock formation, which continues up the valley and crosses the river, south of the greater part of Northampton. Here the hills are higher, Mount Tom and Nonotuck on the west side, and Holyoke on the east, reaching an altitude of about 1200 feet.

The Connecticut River at Springfield is but forty feet above tide water, and except in time of freshet, is a sluggish stream, averaging about 1200 feet in width. The important branches in this vicinity are the Chicopee, Mill and Scantic Rivers, that enter from the east, and Westfield and Farmington Rivers, that come from the west, and the largest natural landlocked body of water is Lake Congamond in Southwick, which covers about 410 acres. In nearly all the towns there are small ponds, both natural and artificial.

The land of the river towns is sparsely timbered, being mostly under cultivation. The mountain regions east and west of the river are heavily timbered, chiefly with deciduous trees, consisting principally of chestnut, white oak, gray birch, sugar maple, with a sprinkling of white pines and hem-

locks, and on the east side the pitch pines are quite numerous. Along the streams may be seen the willows, elms, red and white maples, river poplars, alders, pin oaks, and buttonwoods. In Russell and Montgomery there is quite a growth of tulip trees; on the trap rock range the red cedars are common, and here and there in the valley can be found black and red oak, sassafras, black and paper birch, and many other kinds not generally common; on the hills to the west of Westfield there is an immense growth of mountain laurel, and considerable is found on the Wilbraham hills, and a little in the river towns.

One of the great attractions to bird life near Springfield in late Summer and Autumn, particularly to the water birds, lies in the wild rice, *Zizania aquatica*, that grows so profusely along the banks of the Connecticut river. About twenty years ago many bushels of the seed of this plant was brought from Wisconsin and Canada and scattered along the shores of the Connecticut, and in some of the ponds; in all the latter the attempt to introduce proved a failure; whether the large quantity that now grows along the banks and in the river is due to the seed that was so distributed, it is pretty hard to say. Prior to 1878 there was quite a little growing here, as had always been the case down the river towards the Sound; about that time the dam across the Connecticut at Enfield, ten miles below Springfield, was raised, which decidedly slackened the current above, making the conditions much more favorable for wild rice to thrive; very likely the rapidly increasing growth here, that began just about that time, was owing to that fact rather than to the planting of the seed; anyway, it then seemed to appear on the river in every suitable place, whether seeded by man or in other ways. Wild celery, *vallisneria spiralis*, the root of which is a favorite food of some of the duck family, is common here, both in the river and ponds. In order to attract some of the water birds, roots and seeds of this plant were brought here from the West about eighteen years ago and planted in the river, and it was successfully propagated in both ways; which was an unnecessary step, as there was plenty of it here before. Knotweed, *Polygonum Amphibium*, arrow head, *Sagittaria variabilis*, button bush, *Cephalanthus Occidentalis*, ground

nut, *Apios tuberosa*, and several kinds of wild grass, all grow along the river, furnishing food for various kinds of surface feeding ducks.

With all the reliable text books on New England birds, a local list may seem to many uncalled for, but we sometimes find bird life different in short distances. For instance, less than fifty miles to the south and west of Springfield, there is a decided change in Summer residents, in the latter direction undoubtedly accounted for by reason of variation in altitude, but in the former the reason is not so apparent, at least why the difference should be so marked in so short a distance and with practically the same flora, temperature, and altitude.

To well know the bird fauna of any particular section of the country, observations must extend over a series of years, and this is particularly true of the water birds; many of them are very irregular in their appearance, and their visits here are often short, owing to the absence of their favorite food, and in late years to the persistent manner in which they are driven away. An observer near a river like the Connecticut, and above tide water, by the latter part of Summer, can make some reliable calculations as to the probabilities of the presence of surface feeding ducks in the river, a month or two later. If the rainfall has been heavy during the Summer, and the river high, the vegetation along the shore will be destroyed, or only have a stunted growth; thus their food supply being scarce, if they stop here on their way South, they soon pass on. When the Connecticut river is high and roily during the time of their migration, none of the sea ducks make any lengthy stay, it being so hard for them to find their food; and few, if any, of the so-called shore birds stop here when such conditions prevail. In this list I have indicated the authority for the occurrence of a bird here, if it is otherwise than from my observation, and have only made a record when the evidence was conclusive. I do not treat towns more than twenty-five miles distant as being within the vicinity of Springfield. The numbers prefixed to the names of the birds correspond with those used in the check list adopted by the American Ornithologist Union, and with very few exceptions are those found in Chapman's Hand-book of the Birds of Eastern North America.

2. **Colymbus holboellii (Reinh.)**. HOLBOELL'S GREBE. Chiefly an uncommon winter visitor, but Dr. J. A. Allen records its capture in Springfield, the third week in May, in full breeding plumage. The specimen in the Science building, Springfield, was taken alive in Otis a few winters ago and sent to Forest Park, where it soon died. Two have been taken at Belchertown. (See Birds of Amherst, page 45.)

3. **Colymbus auritus Linn.** HORNED GREBE. Some autumns the young of this species are quite common and I have seen them in small flocks; the adults are rarely here. Their food usually consists of frogs, small fish and aquatic insects, but some years ago, while attracting wild ducks by baiting with corn, I found that one of these grebes had developed a decided taste for this grain, and when taken its craw was filled with it. A pair were killed here in full breeding plumage about June 1. (See Catalogue of the Birds Found at Springfield.)

6. **Podilymbus podiceps (Linn.)**. PIED-BILLED GREBE. A rare summer resident and a common spring and autumn visitor.

7. **Gavia imber (Gunn.)**. LOON. A not uncommon spring and fall visitor; Dr. J. A. Allen reports it as breeding here occasionally, but that was nearly forty years ago. I have not known of its presence here in summer for a long time.

11. **Gavia lumme (Gunn.)**. RED-THROATED LOON. Rare spring and fall visitor.

31. **Uria lomvia (Linn.)**. BRUNNICH'S MURRE. For some unknown cause, during the last five or six years, representatives of this species have paid us a number of visits; previous to that time there appears to be no record of its capture here, and now it is far from being common. I took one November 30, 1899, and the same day one was shot in Berkshire county. (See Birds of Berkshire County, page 53.)