

SOME BIRDS OF THE MAE PING RIVER IN NORTHERN THAILAND

by

H. Elliott McClure and Boonsong Lekagul

During the week of December 2 through 7, 1957, the authors had the opportunity of travelling by bamboo raft for more than 150 kilometers down the Mae Ping River of Northern Thailand. As the rafts were propelled by the current and poleman, there was ample time to tally the species of birds that flew across the river, inhabited the sand bars, or were visible among trees bordering the river. H.G. Deignan (1945) reported the species of this portion of Thailand, but few other ornithologists have passed this way. Therefore, we feel that a list of the kinds and numbers of birds tallied during this week will add to the meager information available at present.

The portion of the Mae Ping River traversed is shown in Map 1. with the inset enlarged in Map 2. It lies approximately between 98-99° W. longitude, and 17-18° N. latitude, flowing almost due south between the Thanon Thong Chai and Khun Tan Ranges. These mountains of heavily eroded limestone crowd upon the river with occasional high cliffs festooned with flowstone and great stalactites.

The party making the trip included 16 delegates to the 9th Pacific Science Congress and several Thai. It was under the direction of Mr. Jamchet, Chief Geologist of the Bureau of Mines.

The rafts, constructed of freshly cut bamboo, were 30 feet long and 6 feet wide, and were provided with a cabin of bamboo, covered with the broad leaves of *Dipterocarpus tuberculatus*. Typical of the rafts used by native fishermen or hunters, they were constructed at a cost of six dollars each (Fig. 2). Four guests and two polemen occupied each raft, four rafts for guests and one additional used as the cook shack.

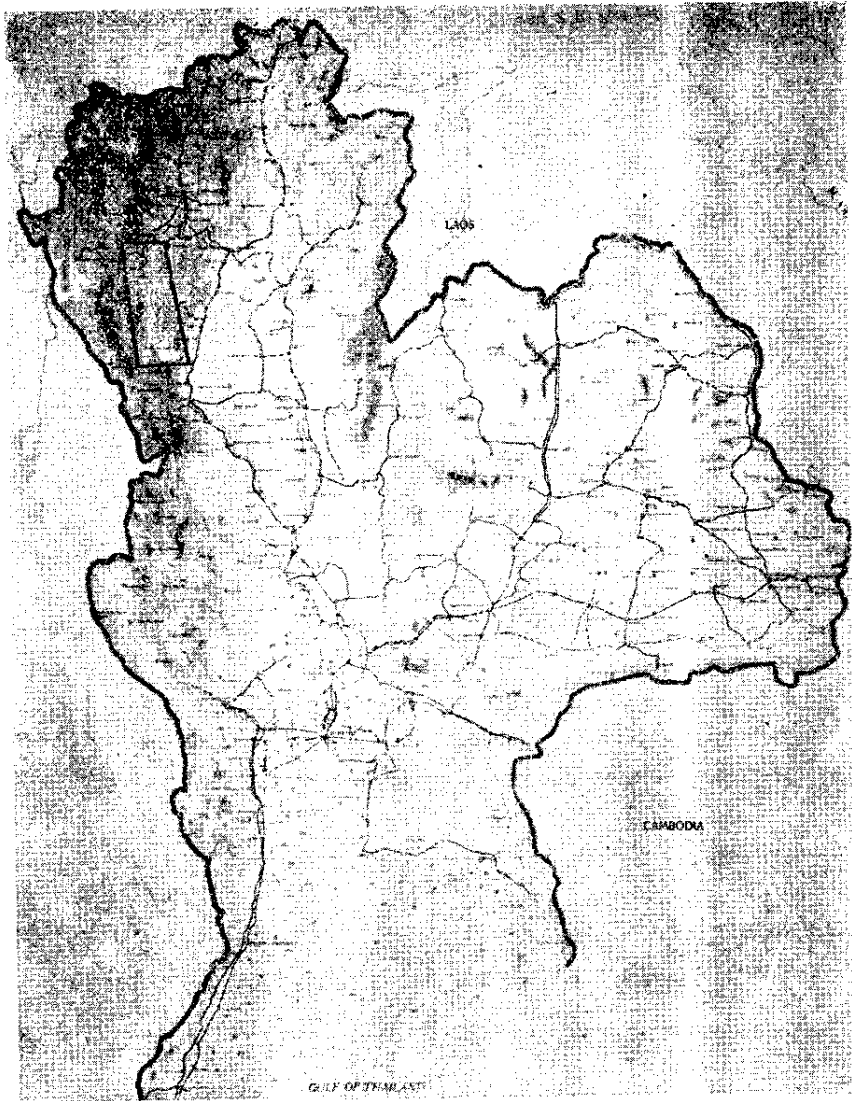
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The expedition arrived by bus at Ban Ann, a small village in an extensive forested floodplain bordering the river, at 1600 on December 2, and immediately boarded the rafts. In the next two hours the rafts floated a few kilometers through a wide flat valley surrounded by high hills. The stream-side was forested with large dark green rain trees, *Samanea saman* planted hundreds of years earlier for the production of lac. These trees were seen at and near the location of villages and the lac harvest was just starting. Although the trees were heavily infested by the insect, *Tachardia lacca*, they showed no evident damage.

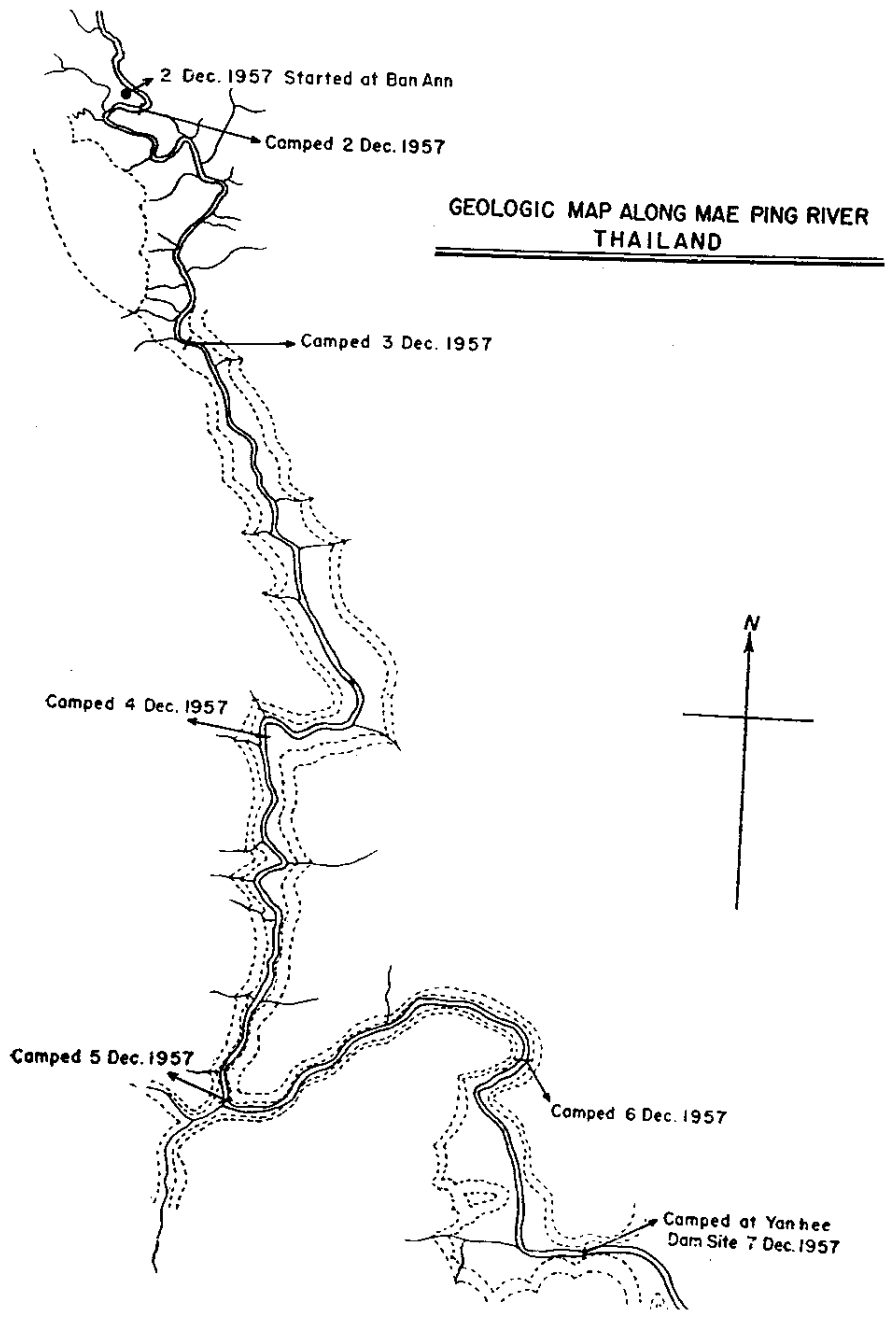
The river flowed among broad sandbars and from these flushed several species of waders and three species of lapwings. In the short period before we beached for supper and the night, we saw 108 birds of 18 species. As dusk fell, several small nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus?*) began feeding inches above the water, sweeping back and forth and issuing an almost bat like squeak. The Barred Owlet began calling as it did evening and early morning of every day. Some of the party spent the night in the tents on the beach and some in the cabins on the raft.

December 3: We passed through a broad valley within which were several villages and some cultivated land along the river. The river was broad and shallow with numerous sandbars upon which were at least 16 species of wading birds or sand dwellers. Most conspicuous of these was the Spur-winged Lapwing. Fifty-one species and almost a thousand individuals were tallied during the day.

December 4: In this part of the river's course, the valley narrowed, villages were left behind, and the country became rougher and wilder. The mountains were covered by a dry deciduous monsoon forest made up of small to medium sized *Dipterocarpus* species, dominated by *Shorea obtusa* and *Pentacme siamensis* with a very dense undergrowth of grasses (*Imperata*) and weeds. Some of the hills were covered with various species of oaks and chestnuts while on other slopes were dense bamboo brakes, all dry or leafless in response to the season.



Map 1. Map of Thailand, the section of the Mae Ping River described here outlined by the inset.



Map 2. Enlarged inset showing the section of the Mae Ping River down which the expedition floated.

Many species of birds were seen no more, especially the sandbar forms, for the river deepened and became swifter and with very few bars. We recognized only 42 species and counted 444 individuals.

December 5: We continued through canyons and narrow valleys, limestone cliffs with great stalactites and masses of flowstone towering over the river. The habitat remained dry and wild, and we saw very few villages or evidences of human activity. The species total was about the same as the previous day, but several new forms were added to our list. We saw 39 species and 695 individuals.

December 6: On this day we passed through the most rugged country of the voyage, shooting several rapids between the limestone bluffs. The habitat bordering the river was much the same, green bamboo at the shore line and dry forested hills above. This was the least rewarding day of the week; only 35 species were noted, including 411 individuals.

December 7: The last day of the trip, we came out of the mountains into a broad valley. The river became shallow and sluggish, sandbars reappeared, and villages with cultivated land were along the shore. With the repetition of the type of habitat that we entered on December 3rd came the same species that we had seen then and the day's total was 49 species and 612 individuals.

The species and number of individuals recorded during the week are listed in the accompanying table. Deignan's "The Birds of Northern Thailand", and Smythies' "Birds of Burma" were used as references; only those species were recorded which could be identified from these. We saw most birds clearly, for the nature of our approach did not disturb them. About 4 species were tentatively identified which have been listed as questionable.

Seventeen species were seen during the entire or greater part of the trip. They were, in the main, species closely associated with the river and the foliage bordering it. Terrain and the change

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in forest habitats apparently did not affect their distribution as much as the presence of the river and its associated flora and insect or fish fauna. These were the following, arranged in the order of abundance: Bay-headed Bee Eater, Spur-winged Lapwing, Spotted-necked Dove, Large-billed Crow, Common Sandpiper, White-crested Laughing Thrush, Pied Wagtail, Pond Heron, Lineated Barbet, White-breasted Kingfisher, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Black Drongo, Common Kingfisher, Black-billed Roller, Grey Wagtail, Blue Rock Thrush, and Barred Owllet.

Twelve species were observed mainly in the broad valleys at the beginning and end of the trip. They were the species closely associated with sandbars or with man's habitations. In order of abundance they were: Little Ringed Plover, Red-wattled Lapwing, Little Egret, Black-collared Mynah, Pied Kingfisher, Wood Sandpiper, Brahminy Kite, White eared Bulbul, Large Crow Pheasant, Green-shank, King Vulture, and Osprey.

Some species were seen mainly in the mountains along the swifter parts of the river. These were birds of the forests which were noted when they crossed the river or were in trees near it. The 13 in this category were: Indo-Chinese Grackle, Ashy Drongo, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Green-billed Malcoha, Four-toed Golden-backed Woodpecker, Red Jungle Fowl, Racquet-tailed Drongo, Wire-tailed Swallow, Rufous Treepie, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Blue Whistling Thrush, Red-legged Falconet, and Green Heron.

The remaining species were seen only occasionally or on limited parts of the river. They may have been of local distribution or were overlooked because of dense foliage or from other circumstances.

A total of 86 species and 3,226 individuals were identified during the five days. Since these were all sight records no subspecies determinations were attempted. December is the coolest month in this area, during which there is very little nesting activity of local species. However it is the month when migrants or winter residents should be at greatest concentrations, (Indicated



Fig. 1. A bamboo raft moves rapidly down the tortuous river, flanked on both sides with lime stone cliffs.

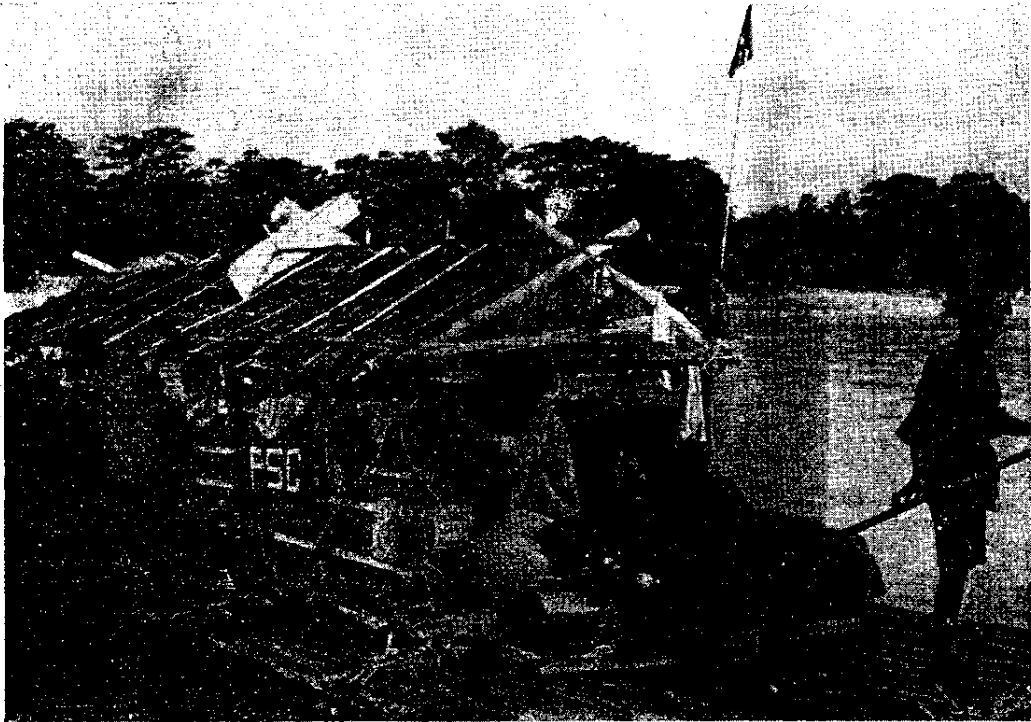


Fig. 2. Bamboo raft used to float down the Mae Ping River.



Fig. 3. Flow stone covered cliffs that rose above the Mae Ping River.

by (2) in the table). Therefore it is somewhat surprising that so few birds were seen. According to Deignan, "Birds are more numerous, both in species and individuals, during the winter months than at any other season." This would suggest that the summer fauna along the river would be sparse, since it was December, the dry season, and the attractive green foliage, insect life, and available water are found along the river.

The water impounded by the Yanhee Dam, where the Ping River leaves the mountains and enters the broad lowlands of Thailand, will submerge the river and associated valleys for the entire distance that we covered in five days of voyaging. The authors hope that at some future date a similar survey along the shores of this great lake can be made and the effect of habitat change upon the bird population noted.

LITERATURE CITED

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**SPECIES OF BIRDS SEEN ALONG THE MAE PING RIVER
IN NORTHERN THAILAND IN DECEMBER 1957**

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	DECEMBER						TOTAL
		2	3	4	5	6	7	
Indian Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>			1			2	3
Green Heron (2)	<i>Butorides striatus</i>			1	2			3
Pond Heron (2)	<i>Ardeola rolloides</i>		23	23	13	1	9	69
Cattle Egret (2)	<i>Ardeola ibis</i>		85	7				92
Great Egret (2)	<i>Egretta alba</i>		2					2
Little Egret (2)	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		24	2			14	40
Plumed Egret (2)	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	4	4	2				10
Pintail (2)	<i>Anas acuta</i>		38	18				56
Pochard (2)	<i>Aythya ferina</i>						9	9
Black-crested Baza (2)	<i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>		13					13
Black-eared Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i> (possibly <i>lineatus</i>)		1					1
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>		7				8	15
Crested Hawk Eagle (1)	<i>Spizaetus nipalensis</i>			1				1
Lesser Fishing Eagle	<i>Icthyophaga nana</i>				1			1
King Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>		5				1	6
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		1				1	2
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1		1			2
Red-legged Falconet	<i>Micro hierax caerulescens</i>			1		1		2
Red Jungle Fowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>			2	5	5	2	14
Green Peafowl	<i>Pavo muticus</i>			1				1
White-breasted Rail	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>			1				1
Gray-headed Lapwing(2)	<i>Microsarcops cinereus</i>		39					39
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Lobivanellus indicus</i>		23			10	10	43
Spur-winged Lapwing	<i>Holopterus spinosus</i>	2	87	60	81	84	65	379
Little Ringed Plover (2)	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	3	59	4	2		16	84
Kentish Plover (2)	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	26	15					41
Wood Sandpiper (2)	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	1	20	1			2	24
Greenshank (2)	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1	7				2	10
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	5	57	16	11	15	22	126
Temminck's Stint (2)	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>		6					6

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		2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL
Great-billed Thick-knee (2)	<i>Esacus magnirostris</i>		1					1
River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	2	1					3
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>			9				9
Pink-breasted Parakeet	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>						2	2
Blossom-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula roseata</i>	35	40	7				82
Slaty-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula himalayana</i>				9	5	10	24
Spotted-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>		63	35	52	35	29	214
Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>		1				2	3
Green-billed Malkoha	<i>Phoenicophaeus tristis</i>			9	5	2	2	18
Large Crow Pheasant	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>		8			2	3	13
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>						1	1
Barred Owlet	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>	3	6	2	1		1	13
Little Nightjar (1)	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>	10						10
Palm Swift (1)	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>			25			5	30
Crested Tree Swift	<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>		35					35
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1	11	1	7	6	5	31
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>		19				10	29
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>		1	5	6	13	15	40
White-breasted King- fisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>		7	7	5	4	15	38
Black-capped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon pileata</i>		4					4
Bay-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	4	22	42	184	23	123	398
Black-billed Roller	<i>Coracias banghalensis</i>		8	2	4	3	3	20
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>						8	8
Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>				6			6
Waved Hornbill	<i>Aceros undulatus</i>					4	1	5
Lineated Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>		4	18	7	10	11	50
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>		4		1			5
Black-naped Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>					7	10	17
Four-toed Golden-backed Woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>			14	1	2	1	18

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COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	DECEMBER						TOTAL
		2	3	4	5	6	7	
House swallow (2)	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>					50	1	51
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithi</i>				2	6		8
Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>					3		3
Ashy Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>				1			1
Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>		13	15	16	6		50
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocerus</i>	4	7	5	8	12	4	40
Racquet-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>				7	2		9
Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>		3		5			8
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	3	68	70	23	12	27	203
Red-billed Blue Magpie	<i>Kitta erythrorhyncha</i>				7	17	6	30
Rufous Tree Pie	<i>Crypsirina vagabunda</i>		1	2	4			7
Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>		1	2	3			6
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>				3		4	7
White-eared Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus aurigaster</i>		4				9	13
White-crested Laughing-thrush	<i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>		4	11	58	18	32	123
Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myiophonus coeruleus</i>			1	1	1	1	4
White-capped Water Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus leucocephalus</i>					1		1
Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>				1		6	7
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		1	3	4	4	3	15
Willow Warbler (1) (2)	<i>Phylloscopus sp.</i>					9	15	24
Long-tailed Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>			1				1
Pied Wagtail (2)	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	1	47	7	15	6	25	101
Gray Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1		3	7	8	1	20
Indo-chinese Grackle	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	2	22	5	126	23		178
Crested Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>		27					27
Ashy-headed Myna	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>						30	30
Black-collared Myna	<i>Sturnus nigricollis</i>		6	2			28	36
Total Species		18	51	42	39	35	49	86
Total Individuals		108	956	444	695	411	612	3226

(1) Questionable Identification.

(2) Probably Winter residents.