

A STUDY OF ROAD KILLS

By A. W. SCHORGER

Having occasion to make approximately weekly trips between Madison, Wisconsin, and Freeport, Illinois, for a number of years, a record was kept of all of the birds found dead on the road. The distance between these cities is 70 miles, of which 13 are in Illinois. The period during which observations were made ran from June 8, 1932, through March 27, 1950, a span of 18 consecutive years. In all 693 trips were made, an average of 38.5 per year.

A total of 64 species of birds, some of which would not be expected to be killed by automobiles, was found. The red-tailed hawk and crows were killed where there was a cut in the road or a curve. Most of the crows were killed in winter when they were feeding on rabbits. On occasions I have narrowly missed hitting one. The shorebirds were found where the road ran through marshy land. The lesser scaup was picked up on the bridge that crosses the Pecatonica River when entering Freeport. It had evidently followed the river, rose to clear the bridge, and was struck by a car.

Chimney swifts have a habit of hawking over the concrete roads when there is a sharp drop in temperature. My journal entry for May 29, 1947, reads: "Temperature dropped to 34° last night. Cold until about noon when it warmed somewhat. I crossed the bridge over the Pecatonica on my way home at 3:15. There was a strong, cold wind blowing from the west. The embankment beyond the bridge is sheltered by trees and shrubs, and about 20 chimney swifts were feeding over the concrete road, flying as low as two feet above it. Some of the birds swooped down to it at right angles and others flew over it lengthwise. Presumably there were more insects here than elsewhere due to shelter from the wind. There were five dead swifts in the road, struck by cars, within a distance of 500 feet. All appeared to have been killed within an hour. None was there this morning."

Species	No. Killed	Species	No. Killed
Pied-billed Grebe	6	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	7
Lesser Scaup Duck	1	Black-billed Cuckoo	9
Red-tailed Hawk	1	Screech Owl	235
Bob-white	31	Short-eared Owl	2
Chukar Partridge	2	Whip-poor-will	1
Ring-necked Pheasant	271	Nighthawk	8
Virginia Rail	3	Chimney Swift	9
Sora	9	Belted Kingfisher	2
American Coot	1	Flicker	230
Killdeer	3	Red-headed Woodpecker ..	389
Wilson's Snipe	3	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker ..	2
Upland Plover	4	Hairy Woodpecker	1
Pectoral Sandpiper	1	Downy Woodpecker	5
Mourning Dove	61	Eastern Kingbird	28
Pigeon	2	Alder Flycatcher	1

Species	No. Killed	Species	No. Killed
Wood Pewee	1	Bobolink	5
Prairie Horned Lark	9	Eastern Meadowlark	37
Tree Swallow	2	Western Meadowlark	45
Barn Swallow	31	Red-wing	53
Purple Martin	8	Baltimore Oriole	11
Blue Jay	17	Bronzed Grackle	91
Crow	11	Cardinal	1
House Wren	2	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	1
Catbird	43	Indigo Bunting	2
Brown Thrasher	59	Dickcissel	1
Robin	310	Goldfinch	22
Wood Thrush	1	Vesper Sparrow	5
Bluebird	10	Slate-colored Junco	1
Cedar Waxwing	1	Tree Sparrow	1
Migrant Shrike	11	Fox Sparrow	1
Starling	31	Song Sparrow	2
Warbling Vireo	1		
English Sparrow	2,784	Total	4,939

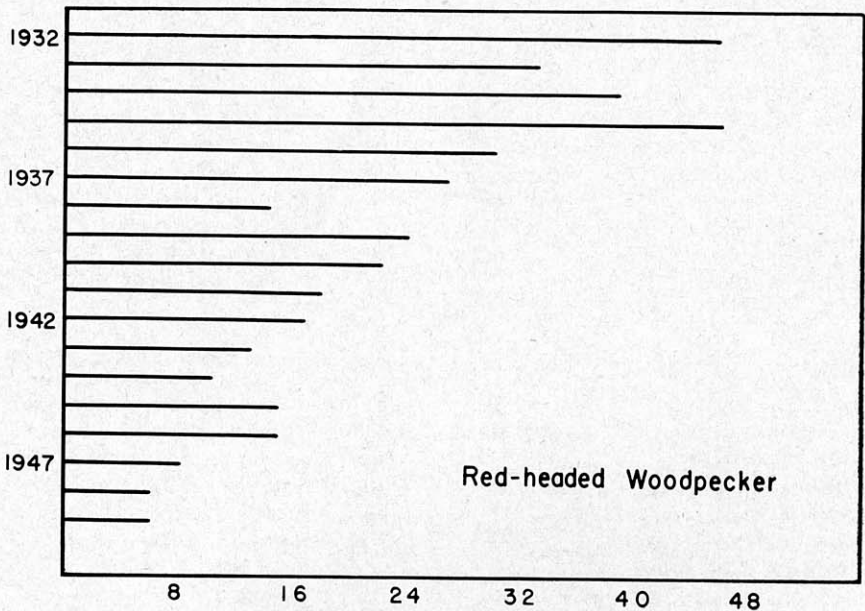


FIGURE 1

It cannot be said that the data on road kills are indices of population trends except in one species, the red-headed woodpecker. Figure 1 shows clearly that there has been a steady and marked decline in the

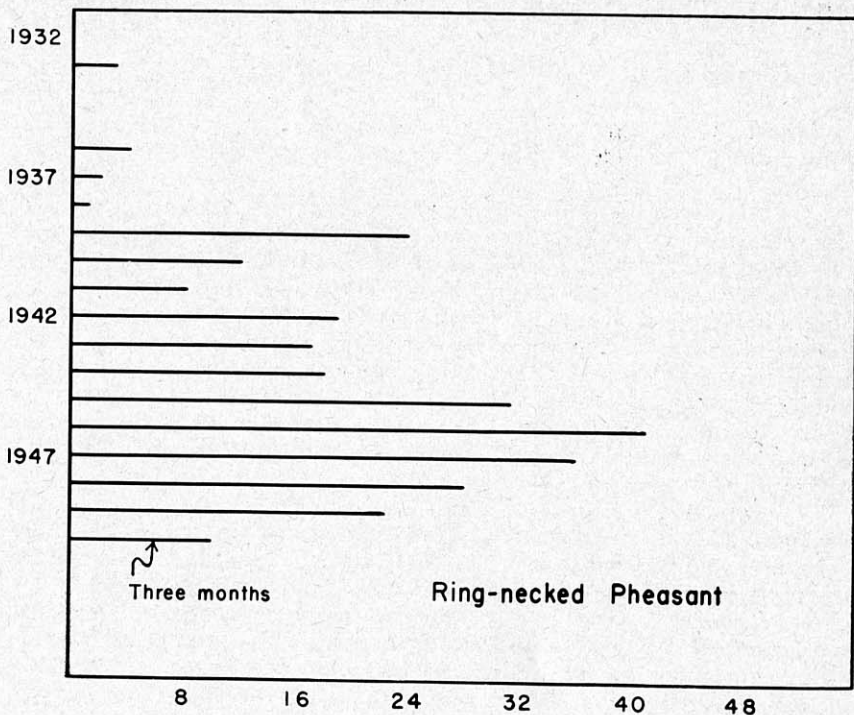


FIGURE 2

population of this woodpecker. The trend is supported by the numbers of live birds seen. The kills of the ring-necked pheasant (Fig. 2), on the other hand, show an increase when this species was approaching a low in the population. The data compiled from the reports of hunters by the Wisconsin Conservation Department show that a high in the state population was reached in 1942, and a low in 1947. Most of the road kills were in Green County which is one of the best pheasant counties in the state. An examination of the hunters' kills showed that this county followed the state curve closely except that the low for Dane and Green Counties occurred in 1948 instead of 1947. It is possible that the high road kills, from 1945 to 1948, were due to an increase in the volume and speed of traffic following the end of World War II.

Dept. of Wildlife Management
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NEWS . . .

President Hickey has appointed a Conservation Committee for this year, made up of Jerry Vogelsang (chairman), Mrs. Dorothy Frister and Bernard Kaiman—all of Milwaukee.

If there is sufficient demand for an up-to-date W. S. O. membership list, such a list will be mimeographed and made available to those who wish copies. If you wish to have a copy, please say so on a post card to the W. S. O. secretary in the near future.

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