

Nifty Tidbits

By **CHUCK RIGBY**

Illinois Valley has been invaded again.

But instead of firefighters or travel trailers, the valley has been invaded by birds from the north. We are not on a major flyway for waterfowl, but we do have some songbirds commonly found somewhere else during the summer and are now here.

The Oregon Junco, a little gray sparrow-like bird with a black head, is a vertical migrant. They are found at Oregon Caves National Monument or higher during the summer, and move down into the valley areas for food and winter protection.

The American Robin is a north-south migratory bird. Illinois Valley is in an overlap region between two races of robins. The robins we saw in the summer have moved to Southern California, Mexico, or Central America. The robins we see now were in Alaska, Canada, and Washington state during the summer. The two types are not very distinct and because of interbreeding the populations are quite similar.

In the northern race, which we have during the winter, the male is darker in the head area with the back of the neck and upper back being almost black. The southern race has a black area on the head, but not as extended. The northern males have darker red breast feathers and less white in the chin, right under the beak.. Also by looking closely one can usually see white corners on the outside tail feathers, which are not visible on the southern forms. The females of both races are about the same, being lighter and less noticeable than the males.

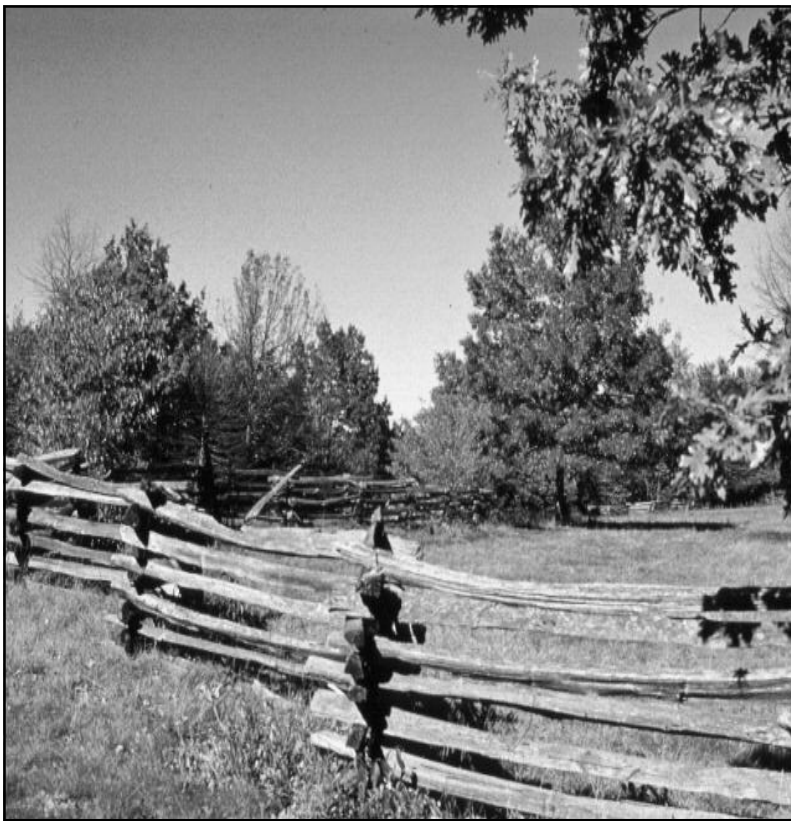
Both groups of robins have the same basic diet, which is not worms in the summer, as it is in the winter. In the summer, insects and berries are more available and are more dominant as their food source. Fruits and berries make up approximately 60 percent of their summer diet. Berry farmers suffer quite a loss of fruit, but they also eat a great deal of harmful insects to make up for the damage.

By the way, in the winter it seems as though robins are listening for worms by cocking their head to the side. Actually they are focusing one eye directly at the ground in order to see the slightest movement of grass or dirt and then quickly probing with their beak at that spot.

The robin is one of the earliest birds to nest in the spring and often produces two to three clutches of eggs. Because they make a new nest for each clutch, they usually have the first nest in small fir or pine trees before the deciduous trees have put out all their leaves. The later nests are usually built in deciduous trees or bushes, where the nest can be well hidden. The scientific name of the robin is *Turdus migratorius*. This might seem like a derogatory name, but "*Turdus*" is Latin for thrush, and so the name means migratory thrush.

Other local members of the thrush family are bluebirds, solitaire, and varied thrush. The varied thrush is also migratory and is found during the winter on the valley floor. It looks and acts like a robin, but has orange breast feathers and orange stripes in its wings and is lighter in color. It also has a distinct black band across the breast area.

Robins, thrushes, and juncos, along with our ever-present jays, make up a good portion of our winter bird population and keep us busy filling the bird feeders, as well as entertaining us with their feeding activities on the lawn.



RUSTIC SCENE - As fall becomes real winter, the leaves continue to fall around the valley. A fairly dry, but quite cold December is predicted, with higher-than-normal rainfall predicted for late December and through January and February.

Fall Chinook count good at Bonneville, says NOAA

The number of returning adult fall Chinook at Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River has topped 474,000, the highest since counting began in 1938, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) said this week.

Biologists with NOAA Fisheries said that good ocean conditions contributed to the strong numbers. Combined with Chinook returns from the spring and summer, the 2002 fall run provided the highest returns on record. Approximately 269,000 spring Chinook and 127,000 summer Chinook were counted at Bonneville Dam during 2002.

Officials with Federal Caucus -- the nine regional federal agencies responsible for natural resource protection and salmon recovery in the Columbia River Basin -- said that focused regional efforts, led by federal, state, tribal and local entities, also are contributing to the rising numbers of returning spring, summer and fall Chinook.

Besides the 474,000 adult fall Chinook that have passed the counting station at Bonneville Dam, 30 miles east of Portland, Ore., some 90,000 fall Chinook have been harvested by sport and commercial fisherman in the Columbia River below Bonneville Dam. Average returns for adult fall Chinook in the Columbia River have been around 203,000 for the past 10 years, making this year's record especially encouraging, officials said.

"For the second year in a row, we're getting very good news from the fish counters at Bonneville Dam," said Brigadier Gen. David Fastabend, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The count at Bonneville Dam includes wild and hatchery fish, with hatchery fish comprising about 80 percent of the

total in a typical year.

"The jack counts give us hope that next year may be yet another year of strong returns," said Bob Lohn, regional administrator for the NOAA Fisheries Northwest office in Seattle. Jacks are smaller salmon that return to freshwater after only a year at sea. Considered to be bellwethers of their spawning class, the jack counts are an early indicator of the next year's run size.

"The 2002 jack count of 40,000 points toward a good year in 2003," said Lohn. "This is particularly encouraging in view of the low water conditions young salmon faced during their migration to the ocean in 2001," said Lohn.

"Good ocean conditions have contributed significantly to the good run, but we've had good ocean conditions in the past," said Steve Wright, administrator for Bonneville Power Administration. "This year's outstanding return of adult fish is a good indication that the investment we're making in the Columbia River and tributaries is paying off for salmon."

Steelhead, protected under the Endangered Species Act like fall Chinook, also are making a great showing. This year's total count at Bonneville is more than 480,000, the second-largest Bonneville Dam count on record. Last year's return of 630,000 was the largest.

"With two good years in a row and the possibility of a third, we will need to continue to vigorously address all the causes that affect the salmon's life cycle, including harvest, habitat, hatcheries and hydropower operations," said Lohn. "While we have a long way to go, these returns show we are making progress."

Progressing in business goals of RCC Business Development

RCC Small Business Development Center's is offering business-related courses to help people get ahead in business or a career.

Understanding the sources of stress and how to take control of stressful situations are aims of, "Check Your Blood Pressure-Managing Stress For Positive Results." It will be held from 6 to 8:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 5.

To help learn specific action that can be taken to beat job burnout and transform work pressure into productivity, "Job Burnout -- Turning It Around" is offered. It will run

from 6-8:30 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 9.

Both sessions will be held at the RCC Small Business Development Center, 214 S.W. Fourth St. in Downtown Grants Pass. The instructor for both is Donna Love of the SBDC, and there is a fee per person per session. Course fees do not include a one-per-term RCC \$5 fee. Pre-registration is required by noon two working days before the class to avoid cancellation. Enrollment is limited.

Phone (541) 956-7494 for telephone pre-registration or further information.

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