

THE ORIOLE

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No. 1

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GEORGIA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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ANNA

STOWELL

BASSETT

by

IVAN R. TOMKINS



Anna Stowell Bassett was an amateur ornithologist of the Savannah region from the 1920's until her activities were limited by old age a few years ago. She died April 1, 1959, at the age of 90, in Whiting, Indiana, and was returned to Bonaventure Cemetery, near Savannah, for burial. Her published writings consist of nine titles, listed at the end of this article. She was a charter member and staunch supporter of the Georgia Ornithological Society from its organization in 1936, an associate of the American Ornithologists' Union from 1927, and active in the Savannah Audubon Society which was organized in 1916. She was a friend of Walter John Hoxie, Gilbert R. Rossignol, Walter J. Erichsen, and other naturalists of the region.

One of her important contributions dealt with the life of John Abbot of Georgia, the noted collector and painter of Georgia birds and insects from 1774 to about 1840. Her research on this subject was painstaking and required the search of old records in courthouses and historical

societies, visits to old cemeteries, and visits to the older residents of the neighboring counties. The resulting paper will always be basic to an understanding of that able but little known naturalist.

Anna Maria Stowell was born at Lawn Ridge, near Peoria, Illinois, March 20, 1869, of sturdy colonial stock. Her youth was spent on the farm, and after formal education, she taught school for a few years, then married Dr. Victor Hugo Bassett. In 1908, they moved to Savannah, which was their home from then on. Dr. Bassett was the City Health Officer of Savannah for thirty years, until his death on November 3, 1938. He was highly respected in his profession, and greatly loved by the poor people of the city. They are survived by one daughter, Ellen (Mrs. Reuben) Swenson, and four grandchildren, in Whiting, Indiana.

Bird students are well aware of the debt they owe to the countless amateurs who have freely given of their time and effort to enrich the literature of that subject. Such an amateur was Anna Stowell Bassett.

PUBLISHED PAPERS

1927. Prothonotary Warbler breeding in Chatham County, Georgia. *Auk*, 44:425.

1928. Yellow-headed Blackbird and Baltimore Oriole in Georgia. *Auk*, 45: 221.

1930. Notes from Georgia. *Bird-lore*, 32: 125

1933. Starling nests in Georgia, *Bird-lore*, 35:210.

1933b. *Anhingas* nesting in Liberty County, Ga., *Auk*, 50:427.

1937. Notes on *Anhingas* seen at King's Pond. *Oriole*, 2:4-5.

1938. Some Georgia records of John Abbot, naturalist, *Auk*, 55:244-254.

1939. Orphans of the Tillandsia. *Oriole*, 4: 13-15.

1941. A late specimen of Bachman's Warbler from Georgia. *Oriole*, 6:38.

1231 East 50th St.,
Savannah, Ga.
May 1, 1959.

GENERAL NOTES

SOME NESTING RECORDS FROM THE WEST POINT GEORGIA AREA.—

The Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) is a common winter bird and is seen in flocks varying from six to one hundred twenty birds. During the summer we seldom see more than two birds in one area, and these observations are usually made in scattered locations.

On April 10, 1953 an adult bird was seen with one young which was apparently just out of the nest. Great effort was made by the adult to distract my attention from the young bird.

On April 20, 1954 we found a nest with four eggs. On our approach the adult bird disclosed the nest which was built in the open at the edge of a seldom used pasture. The bird used the "broken wing" routine and a repeated cry of distress in an effort to lead us away from the nest.

The Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*) can be classified as an abundant permanent resident of the West Point area. A field trip to preferred habitat will always disclose one or more groups of these tiny birds.

Two definite breeding records have been established and should prove the status of the bird.

We found a nest with four eggs, with two adults in constant and nervous attendance, in a fence post on March 30, 1950 within the city limits of West Point. On April 11, 1953 I observed two birds busily carrying nesting materials to a hole in a post in Harris County. Both nests were built in rotten posts with the entrance hole about four feet from the ground.

The Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) is a fairly common winter bird in this part of the state. Almost any locality will disclose several individuals of this species. To date we have no records of summer occurrence later than that of June 30, as explained in this note.

Several late spring dates led us to believe that the Phoebe is also a breeding resident, and every effort was made to verify nesting.

On April 13, 1955 two birds were observed carrying nesting material to a site under a bridge on the State Line Road in Troup County. It was impossible to get under the bridge so we could not confirm nesting. Later trips to the bridge were disappointing for we did not see the birds.

Two birds were seen flying near an old bridge over Long Cane Creek a few miles southeast of the city on May 27, 1956. Again the wild undergrowth, rapid water, and the known presence of poisonous snakes intimidated us and prevented our locating a nest.

The same type of terrain thwarted our efforts to see just where two

birds were taking nesting materials under a bridge on Route 219 south of LaGrange on June 30, 1957.

Finally, on May 2, 1959, in a quiet section of the Ida Cason Callaway Gardens, in Harris County, we found a nest built on a piece of twisted metal hanging under an abandoned footbridge. The two Phoebes in attendance were carrying food to the nest. The adults were rather quiet, with only an occasional calling from one bird that sat motionless on the limb of a nearby Sweet gum tree while the other bird took its turn at the feeding detail. We were unable to see into the nest so could not determine the number of young being fed. GRACE M. WHITEMAN, 1103 Sixth Avenue, West Point, Georgia, February 9, 1960.

LARGE FLOCK OF REDHEADS AT ATLANTA.—After a week of sleet, snow and ice, Atlanta had four inches of snow on March 11, 1960. Two days later, March 13, the snow was gone except for patches in shaded areas. At noon on the 13th, I found a flock of redheads (*Aythya americana*) at East Lake in the southeast part of Atlanta. The birds rose from the water, flew around the lake several times and then settled on the water again. I studied them for an hour.

There were at least 53 birds in the flock, about equally divided between male and female. Because of their activity, I could never get an exact count, but I believe there were actually a few more than 52 individuals. At times, they were joined on the water by nine Ring-necked ducks. The lake also harbored at a distance about 50 Coot and four Pied-billed Grebes.

While the Redhead is described as a locally uncommon transient and winter resident, I found no reports of more than a few birds. This is the largest number of which I can find any record in the State. LOUIS C. FINK, 1060 Canter Road, N. E., Atlanta 5, Georgia, March 14, 1960.

MASS INVASION OF EVENING GROSBEAKS AT ATHENS.—During the first recorded invasion of Evening Grosbeaks into Georgia in 1955 when the first specimen was taken by Gordon Hight at Rome (See Burleigh's GEORGIA BIRDS for details) the species was not seen at Athens, apparently the invasion in that year was concentrated in the northwestern and north central part of the state. It is evident that another large invasion of these birds has occurred during the late winter of 1960, and this time the birds have appeared at Athens in numbers. Our first definite report came from Dr. and Mrs. Clemens de Baillou who spotted a small flock in the neighborhood of their home in the middle of the city on Feb.

10. Since that time we have received numerous telephone calls and other reports of the birds in different parts of town. I personally investigated several of these reports and found in each case that the birds were indeed Evening Grosbeaks. The species is so strikingly different from species normally wintering here that they are noticed immediately by people who operate bird feeding stations. While many reports undoubtedly referred to the same birds, we estimated that there were at least eight different flocks within the city limits and one flock at a suburban area home of (Dr. Barclay McGhee, Head of the Zoology Department) in late February. Most of the flocks were small, up to about 25 individuals, and were observed feeding on the ground, at feeding stations, or in trees such as the Tulip "poplar" or box-elder. At the date of writing (March 20) the birds are still present in the city. EUGENE P. ODUM, Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, March 30, 1960.

A FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD BLUE JAY AT ATHENS.—Since the life expectancy of the average passerine bird which survives the fledgling period is two or three years and since any small birds over six years old is a rarity, the occurrence of a 14-year-old Blue Jay is noteworthy. On April 3, 1947 a Blue Jay was banded on the University of Georgia campus; there was no further record of this bird until it was picked up dead on the same campus on January 22, 1960. Since the bird was at least nine months old at the time of banding, it was at least thirteen and half years old at death and probably nearer fourteen. It was in 1947 that we began our first intensive studies of weight changes in white-throated sparrows, studies which lead to our present research into "migratory obesity" in birds. During 1947 David W. Johnston and James C. Major, then students at the University, were operating banding traps on the campus, and the Blue Jay was one of the birds caught and banded incidental to the study of the White-throats. Our records do not show which man actually removed the bird from the trap and placed the band on the leg, but it was perhaps fitting that the dead bird was found by another student, Edward Menhinick, of Atlanta. As readers of the Oriole know both of the original banders have gone on to high posts in the professional world; Dr. Johnston is Assistant Professor at Wake Forest College and Dr. Major is following a career in Medicine. Since the average "tenure" of a graduate student at the University is about 3-4 years, it is interesting that the Blue Jay had lived through 4 or 5 "generations" of graduate students!

The cause of death of the bird was not immediately apparent; it was thin and in poor condition but did not appear to have been injured. Per-

haps at its advanced age it just died of old age under the stress of winter conditions. EUGENE P. ODUM, *Dept. of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens. March 30, 1960.*

NOTES FROM THE MACON-WARNER ROBINS AREA.—Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) were recognized near the Warner Robins city limits as early as November 21, 1959. A cold wave with low temperatures of 29 degrees F. had moved into our area five days earlier but we could not check on the larks' presence sooner. Both on November 26 and 28 we saw a flock of "several dozen" in a plowed field near Houston Lake, Houston County, along with Water Pipits and Killdeer. On November 29 a small flock was seen in a plowed field near Elko in the southeastern part of Houston County.

On December 5, 1959 we noted six immature Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) in Peach County on the north side of Mossy Creek. They were accompanied by another individual gull, smaller in size, and unidentified.

On February 20 and then again on February 24 Alma Cook noted a single male Purple Martin near Camp's Lakes near Macon, Bibb County. On February 25 Martins arrived at the gourds in the R. C. Ferguson yard near Bonaire, Houston County, where they had nested the year before. On March 5 several Rough-winged Swallows were seen at Faulk's pond in Twiggs County. On March 5 we saw one Common Egret at Myrick's Mill Pond in Twiggs County. In the mid afternoon there was still ice around vegetation on the pond and icicles more than a foot long hung from the old mill. On March 11 Alma Cook saw one individual of the same species on the Taylor County side of the Flint River. March 16 she saw five individuals at this same place. On a trip out of our local area we noted one Egret at Bowen's Mill, Ben Hill County and just south of Abbeville in Wilcox County there were 19 American Egrets in a muddy hollow on March 20.

Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) were noted on the Faulk's pasture pond on the Jeffersonville Road in Twiggs County on April 12, 1959. On this date three individuals were present and during the fall (November 22, 1959) we noted one male. During this year to the present time we have noted three females on January 16, and two females on February 22, March 5, and March 26.

On March 5 we visited the area near Hillsboro, Jasper County and noted a flock of Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) number-

ing approximately 36. On March 19, Mrs. Mildred Grubbs and Mrs. Edna Smith saw them again at the Hillsboro site.

On April 11, 1959, a few miles south of Warner Robins in Houston County, we stopped beside a pasture. A low spot which had been a wet-weather pond the week before was now a damp mud flat with puddles of water. Seeing two small birds on the mud flats, Mrs. Mildred Grubbs and the writer approached to within 30 feet and were able to observe both birds for several minutes through 7x50 binoculars. There were no other birds in the vicinity. The two birds were easily recognized as a Pipit and one of the small sandpipers, a Semipalmated. The back of the Pipit had a "tweedy" appearance rather than the smooth darker color of the Water Pipit. It did not wag its tail frequently. Taking special note of the color of the legs, we found them very light colored. The bird finally disappeared in the low grass of the pasture beside the mud flat. From these many field characteristics viewed at close range we concluded that this was a Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*).

Ed. Note—Mrs. Cater and Mrs. Grubbs are possibly correct in their identification of Sprague's Pipit in the Macon area, however in view of the fact that the species has been recorded so infrequently in the state, it is probably best to give the species hypothetical status in the Macon area until further collecting is done.

On October 17, 1959, just south of Sandy Run Creek in Houston County, a small loose flock of swallows were noted flying over a pasture. Several were recognized as Barn Swallows. Others in the group were small, pure white below, and had iridescent greenish backs. Tree Swallows have been listed as "spring migrants" in the Macon-Warner Robins area from previous observations (Johnston MS). They flew over us within a few feet so the colors were distinctly visible. A few female Purple Martins were also in the group.

On October 18, 1959 we were observing birds in Twiggs County just across the Ocmulgee River from Robins Air Force Base. The area is now owned by the Continental Can Co. and formerly by the Jeffrey-McElrath Lumber. The stand of pines, therefore, represents many years' growth. Mr. Cater called our attention to four woodpecker's that conveniently flew in our direction. Two of them alighted on a tree near us so we saw them at close range. The "zebra striped" back and the large white face patch were distinct, identifying them as Red-cockaded Woodpeckers.

On November 11, 1959 Mrs. Grubbs and I inspected a wet-weather pond in a pasture south of Warner Robins. There was no tall grass at

the edge of the pond and no trees in the vicinity. Two large shore birds were feeding along the edges of this pond. The one was very gray in appearance, had a long bill and bright yellow legs, a Greater Yellowlegs. Two individuals of this species had been noted at this same location just a week before on November 4.

At the other end of the pond was the other bird with an extremely long bill which seemed to both of us to curve down a little. It was gray in appearance but had some brownish coloring which the Yellowlegs did not have. There was a distinct light stripe over the eye. The upper breast was only faintly streaked with light gray, observed with 7x50 binoculars. His legs were completely immersed in the water as he fed, but when the bird flew for a short distance, the legs appeared greenish and only the feet trailed behind the tail. There was a very noticeable wide white streak on the back when the bird flew. This bird was identified as the Dowitcher. MRS. T. J. CATER, JR., 315 Davis Dr. N., Warner Robins, Georgia. March 31, 1960.

THE EVENING GROSBEAK AT AUGUSTA, GEORGIA.—On March 6, 1960, a flock of Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) was observed in the picnic area at the Federal Lock and Dam nine miles south of Augusta in Richmond County, Georgia. The flock consisted of five males and nine females or subadults. At the time, about noon, that they were discovered the birds were sitting quietly in a leafless tree beside the paved drive. During the 45 minutes that they were under observation they fed occasionally on red maple and elm buds and on the mowed shoulders of the drive.

Although on the alert for further occurrences of this species, it was not noted again until March 30, 1960, when five birds were observed feeding in a yard in the western part of the city. This flock, consisting of three males and two females, spent over an hour feeding in and under a dogwood tree.

The present records constitute the first for the occurrence of this species in Richmond County, Georgia. However, a single bird visited a feeding shelf on December 27 and 28, 1954, in North Augusta, just across the river in South Carolina. J. FRED DENTON, 1510 Pendleton Rd., Augusta, Ga. April 7, 1960.

BELLIGERENCY IN A GREBE.—On Thursday, December 17, 1959, the following inter-specific "fight" was observed on Mountain Creek Lake at the Ida Cason Callaway Gardens near Pine Mountain, Georgia. A Pied-

billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) attacked a pinioned adult Snow Goose (*Chen hyperborea*) from underwater four times in the course of several minutes. After chasing the Snow Goose and a companion Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*; also pinioned) about 75 yards across the water, the grebe stopped. The companion Canada Goose was not attacked. Several other Pied-billed Grebes and fourteen wintering Canada Geese in the immediate area did not become involved in the fight. WINSLOW M. SHAUGHNESSY, Ida Cason Callaway Gardens, Pine Pountain, Georgia. February 18, 1960.

FOX SPARROWS AT MACON.—On February 20, 1960, I observed two fox sparrows at the feeding station of Mr and Mrs. Helge Olsen, 1645 Haslett Drive, Macon, Georgia. Their home is located just a short distance northeast of the Ocmulgee River in Bibb County. From that date on two to three birds fed daily with nine being counted on March 20. Mr. Olsen reports that they were last seen on March 28. This is a new late date for fox sparrows in the Macon area. M. ALMA COOKE, 110-B Holt Lane, Macon, Georgia. April 5, 1960.

FROM THE FIELD

Winslow M. Shaughnessy reported the Common Goldeneye (Nov. 24-Dec. 5, a single female; Dec. 9, a male and a female, the presence of the Canvasback from Dec. 5 through the 8th, Hooded Mergansers in late Dec. and in January, a high count of eleven being noted on January 13 and Ring-billed Gulls being seen sporadically in late December and in January and February. A high count of the last mentioned species was a flock of 14 on January 1, 1960. All of these birds were noted at the Ida Cason Callaway Gardens near Pine Mountain, Georgia.

Dr. J. Fred Denton observed a flock of 14 Evening Grosbeaks near Augusta on March 6. This species has pushed farther south in the state this past winter and in greater numbers than has been the case in any recorded past winters possibly due to the severe weather conditions. Other instances of its occurrence in the state can be noted in the General Notes section of this issue. Readers are urged to report additional recordings of the species in order that the magnitude and southernmost extent of the "invasion" may be ascertained.

The Baltimore Oriole was reported by Ivan Tomkins in Savannah on January 18-19 and on January 30. The bird was a single male. It was also noted at Macon by David Johnston on December 27, the single bird

again being a male. Fred Hebard collected a female Baltimore Oriole in Charlton County on October 29. L. A. Wells at Columbus reports Common Loons (as many as nine at one observation from October 28 to November 20), Blue Goose, four on November 3, Snow Goose, three on October 31, Sandhill Crane, 1 on October 23, Black Tern, two from July 25 to the 27th, Horned Grebe, two on November 20, Shoveler, four on November 1 and 2 and the late departure of the Chimney Swift on October 30 when an estimated flock of 500 birds was noted.

Parker B. Smith reports the sighting of a flock of Sandhill Cranes, 40 in number, flying in a "V" formation over Decatur, Georgia on March 13. The weather was clear and cold and the birds were calling. In Irwin County near Osierfield Milton Hopkins also noted a flock of 113 Sandhill Cranes on March 10. The time was 4:00 P.M. and the birds came in low over a pond and pastures and circled at about 800 feet for approximately fifteen minutes, then began soaring to a height of nearly 2500 feet before leaving in a loose "V" formation in a north-westerly direction. Hopkins also noted a Mourning Dove's nest on the ground with two young on January 9, collected an American Bittern on Dec. 10, 1959 in Ben Hill County, an albino Phoebe in Irwin County on March 1, found the Purple Finch and Fox Sparrow in good numbers this winter, and noted the Golden Plover (three individuals and a first record for the region), Dowitcher 1, Pectoral Sandpiper 5. The last mentioned three species were noted on mud flats at the Bowen's Mill Fish Hatchery in Ben Hill County on March 20. The plovers were observed as close as 25-30 feet and then their flight pattern or rather the lack of it dorsally convinced me of the identification. Bud Jones of Tallapoosa, Georgia reports a "flock" of Evening Grosbeaks on March 19 and also one male Dickcissel which was singing.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

The POCKET CHECKLIST OF GEORGIA BIRDS is in the hands of the printer, and probably will be published in April. Copies then can be obtained from the Business Manager. The price will be 50 cents. The work will be pocket size and paper covered. All species known from the state, plus a few subspecies, will be listed by common name, on ledger paper, with abundant space for writing in notes. A brief account of the range within the state will also be given.

It is thought that this book will be useful for several purposes. It can be used to record data in the field; or perhaps as a species index for more

lengthy journals. Perhaps some birders will want one copy for general use, another for data on a particular locality.

As there are many bird club members who are not members of G.O.S., it is suggested that each club obtain a number of copies from the Business Manager of the G.O.S. in order that each birder of whatever degree may have an opportunity to obtain one. IVAN R. TOMKINS, 1231 E. 50th Street, Savannah, Georgia. February 1960.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF SPRING MEETING—The spring meeting of the G.O.S. will be held at Gatlinburg, Tennessee on May 5, 6, 7, in a joint session with the Wilson Ornithological Society.

BACK NUMBERS OF THE ORIOLE AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS OBTAINABLE FROM THE BUSINESS MANAGER.—Ralph Ramsey, 679 Amsterdam Ave., N. E., Atlanta 6, Georgia, has indicated that all back numbers of The Oriole are available except the following out-of-print issues:

Vol. V No. 3—September 1940

Vol. VI No. 2—June 1941

Vol. XII No. 4—October 1947

These out-of-print numbers will be reprinted as funds become available.

Libraries and others who may wish to obtain a complete set of The Oriole should be encouraged to buy a set now while most of the numbers are still available. Anyone who buys a set now will be sent the out-of-print numbers as soon as they are reprinted. The price of the complete set, Vol. I to Vol. XXIV, is \$55.00. The majority of the back numbers of The Oriole sell for 50 cents each, however, there are several which sell for \$1.00 and a few for 25 cents each.

The following regional papers are also available: Birds of Athens, by Thomas Burleigh, 50 cents and The Birdlife of the Savannah River Delta, Gaviiformes through Charadriiformes by Ivan R. Tomkins, \$1.50.

RECENT LITERATURE

BIRDS OF ALASKA.—by Ira N. Gabrielson and Frederick C. Lincoln. 1959 The Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, Penn., and the Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, D. C., 922pp. \$15.00.

The following account represents merely an outline of this latest state bird book rather than a critical review of its contents. This particular

position is taken because (1) the reviewer is not especially qualified to discuss the merits of the book and (2) penetrating critiques have already been published in *The Auk* and *The Condor*. The reader might wish to turn to these reviews for a more intensive analysis of the book, but for the moment, let us simply summarize its contents.

The authors have spent 14 years of research and writing this book which encompasses 321 species represented by 414 subspecies. Olaus J. Murie, long associated with studies of Alaskan Wildlife, has joined Edwin R. Kalmbach in preparing the illustrations for the book. Unfortunately only 52 species are depicted. In addition to these bird illustrations, at the end of the book is a small map and gazetteer of the state. The latter though showing significant inadequacies, will still be of considerable value to those unfamiliar with the geography of Alaska.

The first chapter treats the history of Alaskan ornithology, embracing three general periods—Russian, American, and modern. Chapter two is entitled "Some Interesting Aspects of Alaskan Ornithology" wherein the authors discuss features of relative abundance and distribution patterns. Migration is the subject of chapter three, a brief one. Ecological zones of Alaska comprise the contents of the next chapter. The next 800-odd pages are devoted to a systematic discussion of the species and subspecies occurring in the state, and for each species, there are data on native names, descriptions of subadults and adults, general range (world-wide or otherwise), range in Alaska, and "haunts and habits." The latter section is a kind of potpourri of miscellaneous facts on food, nesting, migration, habitat, and the like. Throughout this systematic coverage, considerable importance is attached to subspecies, especially in the use of cumbersome vernaculars, but, for some of the polytypic forms such as Fox and Song sparrows, some treatment of their many subspecies in Alaska was desirable. There is, at the end of the book, a lengthy bibliography and list of references.

Undoubtedly, this is a valuable presentation of Alaskan ornithology, and will no doubt stand for many years as the definitive work for the state. It is also true that significant areas of research are practically untouched in the state so that in the immediate future we might expect notable publications relating to speciation, distribution patterns, and physiology.

DAVID W. JOHNSTON.