THE ORIOLE

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF GEORGIA ORNITHOLOGY



SPONSORED BY
THE ATLANTA BIRD CLUB

JULY 1936

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THE ORIOLE

VOL. I.

JULY, 1936

No. III.

A Quarterly Journal of Georgia Ornithology: Sponsored by the Atlanta Bird Club

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE LIMPKIN AND ITS STAPLE FOOD

By FRANCIS HARPER.

The note by Frederick V. Hebard in the April issue of The Oriole concerning the Limpkin (Aramus pictus pictus) in Charlton and Camden Counties, Georgia, brings to mind a very interesting correlation between the distribution of the bird and that of its principal food—the large fresh-water snails of the genus

Pomacea (formerly and better known as Ampullaria).

Since the Limpkin is dependent primarily upon these snails for its existence (cf. Cottam, Wilson Bulletin, vol. 48, p. 11, 1936), it can not be expected to wander far, or remain long, beyond the range of Pomacea. Records in the literature and specimens in the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (kindly placed at my disposal by Dr. H. A. Pilsbry and Mr. E. G. Vanatta) show that the genus Pomacea is widely distributed over practically the entire Florida Peninsula down to the southern portion of the Everglades. It also extends northwestward to a point in Jackson County, not far from the Alabama line, and northward along the Atlantic Coast to the lower Altamaha River, Georgia. The localities are indicated on the accompanying map (figure 1). Practically all of these records pertain to the species Pomacea paludosa (Say) (figure 2) and its subspecies, P. p. miamiensis (Pilsbry), the latter extending along the coast from Palm Beach County southward. There is also a distinct species, Pomacea pinei (Dall), occupying an apparently restricted area along the Homosassa River in Citrus County, Florida.

Presumably the Limpkin is not connoisseur enough to discriminate between the various forms of Pomacea. Its breeding range in Florida, as given by Howell (Florida Bird Life, 1982, p. 200, fig. 23) and on the present map (figure 1), appears to be very nearly coextensive with the range of Pomacea.

A few records from outpost localities call for a little comment. The northwesternmost available record for the snails is on Spring Creek, three miles west of Marianna, Florida. Whether or not the Limpkin now occurs on Spring Creek, it very likely did so in former times (when its range and numbers were less restricted than at present), provided the snails were there in sufficient abundance. Neither the snails nor the bird seem to be known farther west toward the Mississippi Valley. Since the snails are evidently dependent on the presence of a certain amount of calcium carbonate in the soil and water, their occurrence on Spring Creek may be accounted for by a calcareous hammock belt occupying the area about Marianna (cf. R. M. Harper, Generalized Soil Map of Florida, Florida State Geological Survey, 1925.)

William Bartram's record (Travels, 1791, p. 49) of the Limpkin on the Altamaha in 1773 is nicely substantiated, in a way, by records of Pomacea from Darien and Hopeton Plantation, on the lower part of that river. No recent occurrence of the Limpkin on the Altamaha seems to be known, although H. B. Bailey's statement (Bull. Nuttall Ornith. Club, vol. 7, 1883, p. 42) of its nesting in Georgia between the years 1853 and 1865 presumably refers to this part of the coastal region. Two records from South Carolina (Wayne, Birds of South Carolina, 1910, p. 35) evidently pertain to accidental wanderers beyond the

range of their staple food.

My record (Auk, vol. 30, 1913, p. 493) of the Limpkin on Honey Island Prairie, Okefinokee Swamp, in May, 1912, while amply confirmed by later experience with the species in Florida, should not have led to the inclusion of the swamp as part of the Limpkin's normal range, as was done in the 1931 edition of the A. O. U. Check-List. The bird of 1912 was probably nothing more than

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a straggler, unable to maintain more than a very temporary existence in the Okefinokee, whose acid waters are quite unsuited to Pomacea. The bird could have readily reached the swamp by ascending the Suwannee River from its breeding haunts on the lower course of that stream.

The recent records on Mill Creek, Camden County, and vicinity are of special interest as perhaps reestablishing the Limpkin as a breeding bird of Georgia. Further investigation should be made to determine whether Pomacea also occurs there, and if so, in what abundance. All the available evidence indicates that the Limpkin's normal breeding range is restricted to areas where Pomacea is present in reasonable numbers.

A decided decrease in the numerical status of a species (such as has occurred with the Limpkin) is apt to result in its withdrawal from outlying portions of its range. This may account for the Limpkin's present apparent absence from the extreme limits of the known range of Pomacea, such as the Altamaha River in Georgia and Spring Creek in Florida.

According to Dr. Pilsbry, the snails may remain in water of some depth during the day but come into the shallows at the water's edge or even out of the water during the night. This habit of theirs might conceivably lead to some nocturnal activity on the part of the Limpkin, in order to secure the snails more readily. Very little seems to have been published on such a phase of its life history, although Nicholson remarks (Auk, vol. 45, 1928, p. 308), "All through the nesting season their ealls are heard at night everywhere over the marshes."

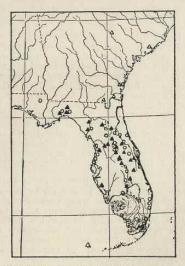
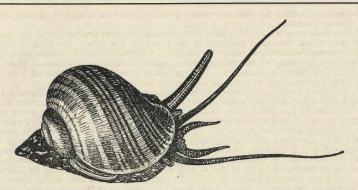


Fig. 1.—Distribution of the Limpkin and of snails of the genus Pomacea in the Southeastern United States. Circles represent records of Pomacea; solid triangles, breeding localities of the Limpkin; hollow triangles, outlying records of the Limpkin.



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Fig. 2.—Pomacea paludosa (Say), from Florida. (Life-size drawing by Miss Helen Winchester; courtesy of The Aquarium.)

A TRIBUTE TO A BIRD LOVER By ANNA STOWELL BASSETT.

On March 18, 1935, Mr. Audley F. Maxwell King died of tetanus in a Savannah hospital, at the age of sixty-five years. By his untimely death southeastern Georgia lost one of her truest conservationists, and her birds one of their best friends

Mr. King was not an ornithologist. He did not read about birds to any great extent and did not write of them at all—just admired, loved, and cherished them in his little corner of the universe. His was the bird-lore that comes from long association and careful observation.

He lived most of his life at Maxwellton, a large plantation on Colonels' Island, Liberty County, Georgia, which was acquired by Colonel Audley Maxwell in 1817. This plantation consists of over one thousand acres of beautifully wooded land, bluffs overlooking deep tidal rivers, and over two thousand acres of salt marsh. Mr. King had it posted as a fur farm. In winter he trapped mink, raccoon, opossum, and other fur-bearing animals. He loved every foot of the place, but his especial pride was a twenty-acre pond where marsh birds nested.

This pond was originally a rice field; the water for flooding it coming from a large flowing well. After the growing of rice was discontinued, the water, impounded by low dams, collected forming a shallow pond. Button-wood, willow, and other water-loving shrubs and trees, tall cat-tails, reeds, rushes, grasses, a few water-lilies and American lotus were soon growing there. As soon as there were trees and other cover for them, marsh birds began to use it for nesting. Tall trees of many kinds and abundant shrubbery bordered it, save where the outlet flowed out over hard marsh, covered at high tide—a favorite feeding place for shore birds and many of the marsh birds.

Bordering the shores of Colonels' Island there are hundreds of square miles of salt marsh, threaded by tidal rivers that extend to the sea islands. These furnish an unfailing supply of food for marsh-loving birds.

It was my privilege to go out to this pond many times and at all seasons of the year, during the seven years we knew Mr. King. He was most generous in showing its wonders to his friends, giving many the opportunity to see the birds. He patiently poled the boat through the shallow water and aisles cluttered with plant growth. The part where the cat-tails grew was especially difficult. For four years he aided us in taking a census of the birds nesting there, for the Biological Survey. Indeed, the survey could not have been made without his effi

cient help. On May 15, 1931, we counted eight hundred and fifty nests, the largest census to date.

The following winter Mr. King was inspired to raise the height of the dams one foot, which increased the area of the pond by five acres, and took in many tall pines and other trees along its margin. This was most fortunate since the spring of 1932 was one of great drouth. Most of the ponds large and small in southeastern Georgia were dry. This caused a great concentration of birds in the King's pond with its never failing water supply.

The fourth census of birds nesting was made May 30, 1932. Although the King's pond is forty-five miles from Savannah, we were out on it soon after seven A. M. and counted nests until six P. M. with one hour out for lunch and rest at noon. Every available tree and shrub was used by the birds. Nests of the Louisiana heron led with 1139. Next came the little blue heron 606, snowy egret 503, American egret 160, green heron 37, black-crowned night heron 22, great blue heron 12, least bittern 5, anhinga 14, Florida gallinule 7, red-winged blackbird 45. The total number of nests was 2550. Later in the summer, nests of anhinga increased to 30 or more, and we found herons incubating in August.

Mr. King thought highly of the red-winged blackbirds. He called them the policemen of the pond. He said the blackbirds did more to protect the herons' nests from the attacks of fish crows than the herons did. There were two kinds of nests of the red-winged blackbirds; some were pendant from low branches.

others were in tussocks of grass, well down, out of sight.

In addition to the thousands of nesting birds, wood ibis that habitually haunt the pond in summer and fall, came in increasing numbers. After counting them one summer afternoon we all concluded that one thousand was a conservative estimate of their number. Many of them still had the downy necks of young birds. They were a wonderful sight either when soaring high or roosting on the bordering trees.

In addition to the bird colony that summer was a flock of two or three hundred young white ibis which came in at evening to roost. I have often thought our count of nests in 1932 must have included a large proportion of the marsh birds

nesting in southeast Georgia.

Mr. King had a keen sense of humor, a gentle wit, and a most kind and accommodating disposition. Nothing was too good for his friends, and no trouble too great to take for them, yet, as his sister, Miss Julia, often said: he was a man of very strong feeling, great determination, and forceful character.

From some point of vantage he used to watch the herons as they came home from their feeding grounds, usually in small groups and from every direction. He noticed and loved their every graceful motion. It really was a lovely sight to see them outlined against the sunset sky flying home to their roosts, or to their nests filled with querulous young or unhatched eggs. In the fall of 1932, fully 20,000 birds came here to roost. As dusk fell and only white birds showed in the gathering darkness, the trees looked as if laden with great white flowers.

Both Mr. King and Miss Julia have told me that when their father was a boy-over one hundred years ago-roseate spoonbills were commonly seen on the marshes about their home. Then came the fashion for feather fans and these lovely birds were sacrificed to make pink feather fans for fine ladies.

It seems most fitting that while taking Mrs. H. W. Butler and party out to see the herons in July, 1934—the last summer of Mr. King's life—they should see a roseate spoonbill and that Mrs. Butler should get a snapshot of it.

While on the pond, Mr. King took great pleasure in pointing out its interesting features, such as the bubbly path of an anhinga as it swam under water, the alligator's nest with eggs in it, red-breasted perch guarding their sandy nests near the artesian well, the sleek path over the dam made by an otter, the great nest of the osprey, the floating nest of a grebe, and the deserted nest of the great red-tailed hawk he had shot, fearing it had designs on his beloved herons. We saw the hawk, too.

When a severe storm damaged the nests in the heronry, he was filled with pity and regret as he gathered and counted the dead baby herons. The whole place was a sanctuary where songsters of all kinds were safe. A pair of green herons nested above the front porch, a pair of pileated woodpeckers near the barn, and chuck-will's widows in the woods near by.

Neither Mr. King nor his sister married, and their fine inheritance has passed into other hands.

NOTES AND NEWS

The Roseate Spoonbill in Georgia.—In the article by Mrs. Bassett in this issue of The Oriole, mention is made of the observation of a Roseate Spoonbill (Ajaia ajaja) on the plantation of Mr. Audley King on Colonels' Island, in Liberty County, Georgia. The bird was seen and photographed by Mrs. H. W. Butler of Savannah. The record was published in the Auk for April, 1936, by Mr. Alexander Sprunt, Jr.

The writer thinks that a little more detail about this record would be of interest to Georgia bird students. Mrs. Butler, in a very interesting account, describes the finding of the spoonbill on a July day in 1934. Her party had just flushed a flock of White Ibises, and, to quote Mrs. Butler, "as they went circling away I caught a glimpse, there, among them, of a breath-taking flash of unexpected color, a glowing pink! Pink? Yes, Pink! Such a picture. Hundreds and hundreds of white wings—multiplied by the shadows in the dark water almost circling our heads, sweeping out against a background of richly colored pines; on and up into the blue they went, carrying with them that flaming pink banner. I sprang up, pointing wildly, and dumb but for the shout, 'It's pink, it's pink!' Mr. King was too busy with the boat for a little while to see anything, but one glimpse of that color and he too became much excited, 'It must be a roseate; I do believe it is; look for the spoon on its bill."

Later on they were able to approach quite closely to the bird and secured not only a detailed description, but even a photograph, which, though small, is, as

Mr. Sprunt says, unmistakable.

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Mrs. Bassett, in a letter to the writer concerning this record, mentions several other records of the Roseate Spoonbill from Georgia. Although these are, as she says, not definite enough to be considered authentic, still they are of interest. These include the observation by several people of a "pink curlew" on the marsh between Savannah and Tybee several years ago. This event was recorded in the Savannah Morning News. Mrs. Bassett reports two other observations as follows: "Mr. Jones, who then lived in Liberty County, Georgia, some years ago, and was assistant game warden, once told me of seeing the head of an unusual bird killed on the Altamaha. He described the bill as shaped like a spoon. I mentioned the name Roseate Spoonbill. He said, 'Yes, that is what the man who killed it called it.'

"Mr. Rossignol told me of seeing a fan made from the feathers of a spoonbill

killed in comparatively recent years on St. Catherine's Island."

These reports together with the definite record made by Mrs. Butler give reasonable basis to the hope that the increase of Roseate Spoonbills in Florida may mean that we shall be able to observe these beautiful birds on the Georgia coast, if not commonly, at least occasionally.-Norman Giles, Jr., Biology Department, Emory University, Emory University, Georgia.

Mississippi Kite in Richmond County.—In former years the Mississippi Kite (Ictinia mississippiensis) was a common breeding bird in Richmond County, but due to constant persecution of this beautiful bird by hunters, it has long since become a rarity in this vicinity. On June 28th I located a nest of these birds about ten miles below the city of Augusta in a large cypress swamp. An old, abandoned hawk nest in the top of a tall cypress tree had been taken over by the kites, who simply added an additional layer of twigs and leaves to form their own home. I succeeded in climbing a nearby tree and observed the birds through glasses. The young were in the nest and occasionally one of them would raise his head to take a peek at the outside world. I was very much impressed by the graceful fight of the adult birds who moved through the air very swiftly with apparently very little effort on their part. The kites were very shy and I experienced much difficulty in approaching the vicinity of the nest very closely.-Dan Henderson, Augusta, Georgia.

Does the Duck Hawk Nest in Georgia?-The Duck Hawk (Falco peregrinus anatum) occurs in Georgia as a regular but rare transient and possible winter

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resident, but has never been known to nest in the state. The range as given in the 1931 A. O. U. Check-list is as follows: "Breeds locally from Norto Sound, Alaska...south to...Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, and in the mountains to Tennessee." As the range states the Duck Hawk has been found breeding in Tennessee, on the Cumberland Plateau not very far from the Georgia line.

Lookout Mountain, part of the Appalachian Plateau in extreme northwest Georgia, offers perfect habitat for the Duck Hawk. Sheer sandstone cliffs are to be found on both sides of the mountain which is synclinal in structure and extends over sixty miles in a southwest direction across Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. The age and structure of its component rocks are comparable to those of the Cumberland Plateau and considerable similarity in topographic features exists. Both lie in the same life zone and thus similar climatic conditions exist.

Indenting the sides of Lookout Mountain are a number of gorges imposing in appearance and magnificent in proportions. In such a gorge, named Sitten's Gulch in Dade County, a Duck Hawk's call was distinctly heard by Miss Berma Jarrard and myself on May 24, 1936. The bird was never located, but in a spot which almost duplicates the frontespiece of A. A. Allen's "Book of Bird Life" an empty nest was found on a cliff ledge which fits perfectly the description of a Duck Hawk next. On the edge of this nest was the ulna of an animal, probably a fox.

This record is by no means definite, but indicates that further work in the region might establish the Duck Hawk as a breeding Georgia bird.—Don Eyles, Biology Department, Emory University, Emory University, Georgia.

The Florida Gallinule at Athens, Clarke County, Georgia.—On the morning of May 11, 1936, a male Florida Gallinule (Gallinula chloropus cachinnans) fluttered down into a street in the business section of Athens, Georgia. The bird, apparently blinded by the glare and somewhat exhausted, was easily captured by onlookers and brought to me for identification. The bird was kept in the laboratory for a week before it was killed and made into a skin, which is now contained in the Zoological Museum of the University of Georgia. When the bird was skinned no evidence of injury was found.

This record is of interest because it is the first record of the occurrence of the Florida Gallinule at Athens or in the vicinity.—J. Fred Denton, Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

Unusual Nesting Records of the Mourning Dove from Cobb County, Georgia.—The Mourning Dove (Zenaidura macroura carolinensis), although a common resident throughout most of the eastern United States, has never been studied in any detail; thus, little is known about many phases of its life history. The following records may not be actually unusual—only further study will determine this.

The first note concerns the use of the same nest for five successful broods by Mourning Doves, supposedly the same pair. It was located in a pear tree about three and one-half miles from Marietta, Cobb County, Georgia. Miss Louise Franklin observed the nest during 1935 and states that three broods were raised, the last leaving the nest on September 20th. This year one brood was successfully raised early in May; the second brood hatched about June 20th. No new nesting material was added for the second use of the nest.

The second record is that of the Mourning Dove nesting on the ground. This is not a very unusual occurrence and may take place more commonly than is realized. The nest was located in a cotton field in Cobb County about four miles north of Marietta, Georgia. It was placed in some Johnson Grass in an unplowed corner of the field and contained two eggs on June 22, 1936. The nest was not well hidden and contained only short pieces of grass stems and small twigs. It was very shabbly built and contained only about fifty percent as much material in its construction as their usual nest in a tree.—Fred S. Barka-Iow, Jr., Marietta, Georgia.

Swainson's Warbler in Richmond County.—The Swainson's Warbler (Helinaia swainsoni) arrives in Richmond County the third week in April and begins its nesting duties about the first of May. Although considered by many orni-

thologists to be a rare species, I have found that this warbler is quite common in this vicinity during the breeding season. Due to its quiet, retiring manner, inconspicuous plumage and choice of habitat, it is very difficult to locate. Thick growths of cane in the deepest swamps are selected by this bird for a nesting site. The tops of the cane are pulled together and interwoven to form a base on which the nest is constructed, usually about five feet above the ground. Grass, water-soaked leaves and Spanish Moss are the materials utilized in making the nest. In a nest found on June 21st were four young birds, almost large enough to try their wings. One week later they were flying about rather weakly from branch to branch and the following week they had disappeared entirely.—Dan Henderson, Augusta, Georgia.

The White-throated Sparrow in Georgia in June.—While studying birds in the vicinity of Canal Lake Camp near Blairsville, Union County, Georgia, I, in company with Thomas D. Burleigh, collected a male White-throated Sparrow (Zonotrichia albicollis) on June 11, 1936. The singing bird was in breeding plumage and apparently normal as indicated by a thorough examination when the bird was skinned. The testes of the bird were those of a breeding bird, measuring 8.5 mm. in diameter. I might have suspected the bird of breeding had it not been unusually fat, a condition not found in breeding birds. The skin of the bird is preserved in the Zoological Museum of the University of Georgia.

Usually White-throated Sparrows have left Georgia by the last week in May, so that the finding of a bird within the state as late as the middle of June is unusually interesting.—J. Fred Denton, Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

A Georgia Bird Book.—It should be of great interest to all bird students of the state to learn that there will soon be published a book on the birds of a particularly interesting section of the state. This work is now in preparation by Mr. Dan Henderson of Augusta, and will be entitled "Birds of the Savannah River Valley". We feel sure that this work will be a valuable contribution to Georgia ornithological literature.

Correction.—The Editors wish to correct an unfortunate mistake which occurred in the April issue of The Oriole. Through a misunderstanding the list of birds accompanying the article by Mr. Lucien Harris, Jr., was switched for another list. The one published with Mr. Harris' article was not compiled by him during one day near Folkston, Ga., but rather it was a compilation made by Mr. Frederick V. Hebard. In a letter to the Editors Mr. Hebard states that this was "a week list made up between February 23 and February 29, 1936, and includes records not only from the western end of Camden County and the Okefenokee Swamp, but also from Fernandina, Fla., and the Coastal Highway between Woodbine and Brunswick, and also some records in eastern Charlton County."

During this summer the Editors have been working in Alabama with the Alabama Cooperative Wildlife Research Project at Auburn. This is one of the nine projects which have been established in as many states. In Alabama the project is sponsored jointly by the United States Biological Survey, the Alabama Department of Conservation, and Alabama Polytechnic Institute. It is in charge of Mr. Harold S. Peters, Associate Biologist of the Biological Survey.

Of the six investigations to be conducted four deal with birds. The major project will deal with the life history and management of the Mourning Dove. The three others are a Quail management project, a study of water-fowl foods in Gulf State Park on the Alabama Coast, and a study of the Wild Turkey within the state. These projects will undoubtedly contribute a great deal to ornithological science and will eventually mean better hunting for Alabama sportsmen. The science of Game Management is in its infancy and we have no clear idea of its possibilities.

It is hoped that a Cooperative Wildlife Research Project may some day be established in Georgia. This would certainly be most appropriate, for it is in this state that Mr. Herbert L. Stoddard has done a large part of the pioneering work in Game Management. And such a project would be of inestimable value to the sportsmen and bird students of the state.

THE ORIOLE

A Quarterly Journal of Georgia Ornithology; Sponsored by the Atlanta Bird Club

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A VITAL PROBLEM FOR GEORGIA BIRD STUDENTS

One of the principal aims of The Oriole is to encourage active field observation among bird students in Georgia with an aim to increasing our knowledge of the distribution of the various species of birds found within the state. The Editors realize now even more than when the first issue of the magazine was published how fundamental such information is. It also becomes daily more evident how little we actually know about the ranges of many of our birds.

In this issue of The Oriole there are several records of observations of unusual or rare birds within the state. These should serve as concrete evidence of the possibilities which all of us have of contributing to our all-too-meager knowl-

ege of this vitally important subject.

In considering how this problem of distribution may best be investigated, it is soon evident that there are two distinct methods of approach. One is limited by its very nature, and does not apply to the average bird student. It is that side which deals with the ranges of the various subspecific races of certain species that occur within the state. This part of the problem was ably dealt with by Dr. Oberholser in his article in the January issue of The Oriole which was largely given over to a discussion of the need for a certain amount of scientific collecting within the state. Naturally it is hardly necessary to point out that it is not possible for everyone to contribute to this phase of the investigation.

However, there is another side to this problem, and it is with this aspect that the average bird student should be concerned. And all that one needs in order to be of real service to Georgia ornithology is the time and inclination to get out and do some accurate field observation. There are many common species, and some not so common, the limits of whose distribution in Georgia are doubtful. We think that it is a good idea to mention some of these in order to call special attention to them. The following are several birds, the extent of whose breeding ranges within the state are not definitely known: Ground Dove, Black-billed Cuckoo, Whip-poor-will, Phoebe, Fish Crow, Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Swainson's Warbler, Worm-teating Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Dickcissel, Grasshopper Sparrow,

Then there is a group of birds which may be found breeding within the state, but for which we have as yet no definite records. Some of these are: Limpkin, Duck Hawk, Coot, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Warb-

ling Vireo, and Cerulean Warbler. Lastly there are a few species for which we have very few if any recent records. Here may be listed such rarities as Bachman's Warbler, White-tailed and

Swallow-tailed Kites, and Ivory-billed Woodpecker. The species mentioned above are not by any means all that could be named,

but they should certainly impress us with the necessity for a great deal of accurate field work in all parts of the state. We hope this brief account will serve as a stimulation to all those who are really interested in Georgia bird-life.