

THE ORIOLE

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No. II

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FALL LINE ON HABITAT ZONES ALONG THE SAVANNAH RIVER

By E. E. Murphey.

Altitudinal variation in bird-life is a phenomenon familiar to all students; e. g., That northern forms find a climatic and vegetative environment suitable to their needs by following various mountain ranges which extend far south of their normal habitat. The ruffed grouse extending along the high Appalachians to Georgia and Alabama, and the ptarmigan upon the Rockies to Arizona and New Mexico are familiar examples.

But the problem of how slight a barrier may have a definite influence remains to be studied and solved. The middle Savannah valley where the writer has done field work - intermittently, it is true - for forty years presents certain variations in its avi-fauna which seem worthy of mention and discussion.

Running diagonally from northeast to southwest, the geologic "fall line" bisects the counties of Aiken in South Carolina and Richmond in Georgia. This is a range of sand-hills varying, roughly, from 400 to 670 feet in height which rise abruptly from the valley below and mark what was once the marge of a primordial ocean. Only a few miles below Augusta deposits of marine shells and fossils are to be found. The Savannah River cuts a wide gash through these hills, relatively narrow above the fall line, broadening to several miles width in the flat country below it. The soil in the valley proper is alluvial silt brought down through many years from the hill country above and deposited by periodic overflows of the river. Numerous "dead rivers" and lagoons have arisen either from overflow or from the changing of the river-bed which not infrequently occurs in the flat valley country.

Above this line are sand hills, or clay overlain with sand, the sand soon disappearing as one goes westward and northward and being replaced by loam upon a clay subsoil.

The vegetation in these two areas shows a sharp contrast. Below the fall line one finds cypress, tupelo, cotton-wood, magnolia, water oak and willow oak preponderating. Above red oak, white oak, scrub oak and the here omnipresent black jack. Hickory and other hard woods are abundant. Sweet gum, liriodendron, and black gum grow indifferently in both areas. Scrub palmetto comes up to the foot of the hills and disappears, typical canebrakes do not occur beyond them and the Spanish moss ceases at the fall line as if cut by a knife.

Vast forests of long leaf pine formerly covered much of this area but now little is left and much of the second growth has also been cut away.

As might be expected, the bird-life in these two contiguous areas

shows many sharp contrasts—but the rigidity with which habitats are delimited seems to the writer very striking.

The Swallow-tailed and Mississippi kites, both of which were formerly abundant in the Savannah valley, although the former has now disappeared and the latter is rare, were among the species whose habitat was restricted as above described. It was possible to sit upon the edge of the fall line and with a good glass discern kites feeding in the valley below. Yet, they have never been observed above the barrier. They bred in the dense cypress and tupelo swamps, coming out to feed in the grass lands on either side of the river and then returning to the swamps. After the morning feeding was over they would spend an hour or more soaring above the fields where they had fed, very much in the manner in which the wood ibis has so often been observed to do, but even in these evolutions they confined themselves to the valley and would eventually in ever widening circles drift back to the swamps but never soar above the hills. It is possible that some fact of aerodynamics may have been a factor in this habit but the observation was repeated year after year and always with the same results.

The painted bunting breeds abundantly in the valley chiefly as a hedgerow bird and comes up to within a half mile in a direct line from this range of hills but does not pass above them nor has it been known to breed within them although the same type of hedgerow which they so frequent in the valley is present along the cultivated lands on the hills. The same phenomenon to a less degree seems to appear with the blue grosbeak and the indigo bunting. The indigo bunting fairly swarms in the valley country and the blue grosbeak is abundant. Both are seen above the fall line in ratio of about one to five as compared with their abundance in the plains below.

The same condition prevailed with regard to the dickcissel when it was abundant in this region. It is now very scarce perhaps because many of the fields in which they formerly bred have been excavated for the making of brick and are now replaced by brick yard ponds grown up along their margin with rushes and young willow trees which now contain a very different bird population. The grasshopper sparrow's breeding habits and restricted range coincide with that of the dickcissel but it is more widespread in its distribution and seems to have been able to hold its own. It remains, however, a valley bird. The Swainson's warbler does not breed with us except in dense cane-brakes and these cane-brakes, as previously mentioned, cease abruptly at the fall line. The prothonotary warbler is essentially a denizen of the swamps and though it in its distribution follows various small water courses which lead into the hills, it becomes less and less abundant as one goes above the deep swamps. The orange-crowned warbler has frequently been taken in Autumn and Winter in the swamp country below the fall line. The worm-eating warbler also confines itself to the swamps in its migration and the same seems to be true with regard to the magnolia, the bay-breasted, and the chestnut-sided warblers, which three species are practically never seen in Spring but only in the Autumnal migration at which time they, on occasions, may fairly swarm.

The red-cockaded woodpecker confines itself sharply to the pine barrens on the hill tops. The red-bellied woodpecker is chiefly a bird of the swamps although it wanders into the uplands in small numbers. The fish crow keeps strictly to the valley of the Savannah River not wandering more than two or three miles from the river in any direction. The scarlet tanager and rose-breasted grosbeak migrate along the line of the hills but are rarely, if ever, seen in lower terrain a mile or two distant.

Conversely, Bewick's wren is restricted to the hill country and does

not occur in the valley. The chipping sparrow breeds above the fall line and not below it.

The same is true of the Bachman's sparrow. It breeds immediately above the fall line but has neither been observed nor taken below it.

One naturally expects when leaving the mountains of Georgia and traveling southward and eastward, as the terrain changes from mountain to Piedmont foothill, from the foothills to the red clay country, and then on downward below the fall line through the valleys into the flat woods and eventually the tidal marshes, to see a marked variation in the bird life corresponding to the difference in terrain and vegetation. But, the sharp restriction of habitat zones has always seemed to this observer, at least, to be a striking natural phenomenon. Is it due entirely to changes in vegetation, to varying insect life, to differences in temperature or altitude, or are the various factors enumerated all contributing causes? These ranges have not been worked out to any extent in our State although with many of the species in Alabama, the problem has been extensively studied by Arthur H. Howell in his "Birds of Alabama", and many of the maps in this work show just such sharp limitation as has been referred to in this paper. It would be a matter of great information if observers situated along the fall line as it extends across the State of Georgia would contribute their own observations with a view to ascertaining whether they conform to these herein mentioned or whether they differ sharply therefrom. Observers in Georgia have been relatively so few and so widely scattered that the problems of regional distribution for various species is but dimly apprehended or understood. With the formation of the Georgia Ornithological Society, it is to be hoped that before many years, sufficient data shall have been accumulated to throw much light on this and many other problems. And in conclusion, the writer would specially stress the fact that these observations are necessarily fallible, are only the observations of one individual working within a relatively narrow zone. The facts which seem to exist here may not be confirmed in other parts of the State but the impression persists that the regional zones of bird life in this particular locality are very sharply drawn, so sharply, that it would seem as if some Power had drawn a line and said, "Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther".

THE BIRDS OF ATHENS, CLARKE COUNTY, GEORGIA

By Thos. D. Burleigh.

PART I.

Athens lies in the northeastern corner of Georgia, being approximately seventy miles northeast of Atlanta and within fifty miles of the Savannah River which forms the boundary line between this state and South Carolina. Possibly a third of the state is considered as occurring in the Piedmont Plateau, and as far as topography and climate are concerned, Clarke County is characteristic of this area. It is characterized by being rather hilly, with a red clay soil, and scattered stretches of mixed pines and hardwoods that have replaced the unbroken pine forests that once covered the larger part of the state. Land under cultivation is largely devoted to cotton. There are few grassy pastures except in such bottom lands as are found on Sandy Creek.

The notes that follow cover a period of almost fifteen years, from September, 1920, through the first week of April, 1935. For the first ten

years residence at Athens made it possible to keep almost daily records of the bird life of Clarke County. After the first of January, 1930, it was possible to make only infrequent trips to Athens, and to carry on rather limited field work, but records of interest were added from time to time, and it is felt that a reasonably thorough knowledge has been gained of the bird life of this corner of Georgia.

So little collecting has been done in Georgia that definite information concerning the distribution and relative abundance of the various subspecies now recognized by taxonomists is decidedly meager. For this reason specimens were taken throughout the year as opportunity offered, and the records here given are based almost without exception on skins now in the collection of the Biological Survey in the National Museum.

Gavia immer immer. Common Loon.—Possibly because of the absence of any comparatively large bodies of water this species proved to be a rather scarce migrant, and I have but three records for its occurrence here. One was seen November 1, 1925, on the city reservoir, another also on the city reservoir, May 6, 1926, and a third April 10, 1927, on the small lake on the grounds of the Athens Country Club.

Colymbus auritus. Horned Grebe.—This species was likewise a scarce and rather irregular migrant here. It was observed but once during the spring migration, a single bird in full breeding plumage being seen April 10, 1927 on Lake Kirota. In the fall, it was recorded at rather frequent intervals from the latter part of September through the first week of December, as the following dates will show: October 7, 1924, one bird; September 26, October 29 and November 8, 1925, single birds; November 25, 1926, eight birds; and November 5 and December 4, 1927, single birds.

Podilymbus podiceps podiceps. Pied-billed Grebe.—This species was a common migrant both in the spring and in the fall, and of irregular occurrence at other times of the year. It frequently lingered in the late fall until forced farther South by ice forming on the scattered lakes and ponds, and what were apparently non-breeding birds have been seen at infrequent intervals throughout June and July. Average dates of arrival and departure in the spring are March 14 (1925) and April 25 (1927), and in the fall July 12 (1927) and November 21 (1925). Other dates of occurrence are June 3, 12 and 24 (1925), and February 4, (1927) and January 3, (1928). While usually observed in small numbers there have been certain days in the fall when they appeared on all bodies of water of any size, and were noted then in compact flocks. October 15, 1926, was one such day, twenty-two being seen together on the city reservoir alone, with almost as many more at other spots.

Ardea herodias herodias. Great Blue Heron.—While never seen in any numbers, this species occurs here throughout the larger part of the year, being absent only for a short interval during the winter months and again in late spring. Its presence is influenced to a large extent by the weather for it is far more plentiful in summer if rains are frequent, and in mild winters it lingers well into December. Average dates of arrival and departure are March 25 (1926) and November 7 (1924), other dates of occurrence being February 12, 1928, May 29, 1921, and June 6, 1929, and December 15, 1926.

Casmerodius albus egretta. American Egret.—Only during the summer of 1926, marked by frequent heavy rains that flooded the bottom lands, was this species observed here. A single bird appeared July 11, on Lake Kirota and remained there seven days, while from July 26 through

July 31, three birds were found in the open Sandy Creek bottoms. They were all characterized by their lack of timidity, being easily approached at all times.

Hydranassa tricolor ruficollis. Louisiana Heron.—I have but one record for the occurrence of this species here, a single bird appearing on Lake Kirota July 21, 1927, and lingering there for nine days.

Florida caerulea caerulea. Little Blue Heron.—This species was invariably present during the summer months, its numbers, however, being markedly influenced by the weather. During periods of drought, few were seen, while frequent rains in July and August, creating favorable conditions for herons, usually resulted in these birds appearing in large numbers. Throughout July, 1926, the open Sandy Creek bottoms were flooded under several feet of water, and by the 27th of that month, 20 Little Blue Herons had congregated there, although normally one or two would be seen at such a spot. Normally these birds appeared the latter part of June and remained until the first week in September. Extreme dates for arrival and departure are June 13, (1929) and September 30, (1926). My one record for the spring migration is that of a single bird seen March 25, 1926.

Butorides virescens virescens. Eastern Green Heron.—This species was a somewhat scarce summer resident, usually appearing early in April and remaining until the latter part of September. My extreme dates for arrival and departure are March 27, (1925) and October 8, (1922). A nest found May 24, 1925, held three half-grown young, and was twenty feet from the ground in the top of a small wild cherry tree in underbrush bordering the Sandy Creek bottoms.

Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli. Black-crowned Night Heron.—This species was rather scarce during the spring months and rarely seen, but of regular occurrence throughout the summer and observed then from the middle of July until the first week in September. My only records in the spring are a single bird seen April 30, 1925, two April 16, 1926, and a single bird April 21, 1926, while my extreme dates for arrival and departure during the summer months are July 12, (1927) and September 17, (1927).

Nyctanassa violacea violacea. Yellow-crowned Night Heron.—This species was decidedly scarce, and rarely observed either in the spring or in the fall. My three records for its occurrence here are two birds seen April 19, 1924, two September 11, 1925, and a single bird April 6, 1926.

Botaurus lentiginosus. American Bittern.—A scarce but regular migrant both in the spring and fall, single birds being seen at such spots as the Sandy Creek bottoms from the latter part of March through the first week in May, and again from the middle of September until the last of October. My extreme dates for occurrence in the spring are March 17, (1929) and May 15, (1922), and in the fall September 2, (1928) and October 30, (1921).

Ixobrychus exilis exilis. Eastern Least Bittern.—I have but one record for the occurrence of this species here, a single bird being flushed March 25, 1928 from the edge of a stretch of open marsh in Sandy Creek bottoms.

Branta canadensis canadensis. Common Canada Goose.—This species is probably more plentiful in migration here than my records would indicate for I have observed it but twice. On November 6, 1921, a flock of

possibly a hundred of these birds was seen flying noisily by high overhead, and on March 20, 1929 a single bird was found in the flooded Sandy Creek bottoms.

Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos. Common Mallard.—I found this species of irregular occurrence here during the winter months, small flocks usually appearing early in November and being observed then at infrequent intervals until the middle of the following April. Only rarely were more than two or three birds seen together, the largest number recorded being approximately thirty birds that were flushed on January 6, 1924, from the edge of the Oconee River. Unusual dates of occurrence were a single bird seen May 3, 1925 on Lake Kirota, and two birds flushed in the Sandy Creek bottoms September 19, 1929.

Anas rubripes tristis. Common Black Duck.—This species was a scarce but regular migrant here, although more frequently seen in the spring than in the fall. Extreme dates for occurrence during the spring migration are March 9 (1927) and March 31 (1926), and for fall migration, October 16 (1926) and December 3 (1927).

Chaulelasmus streperus. Gadwall.—This species probably occurs more frequently here than my records would indicate for I recorded it only during the fall migration of 1929. A female was found on Lake Kirota October 28, and a male on the city reservoir November 7.

Mareca americana. Baldpate.—This species was a fairly common spring migrant, small flocks been seen throughout March. An early record is that of five birds seen February 15, 1927, in Sandy Creek bottoms. My extreme dates for occurrence otherwise being March 7 (1926) and April 1 (1926). Only once was this species noted in the fall, a single bird, a female, appearing on Lake Kirota November 10, 1927, and remaining there for two days.

Dafila acuta tzitzihua. American Pintail.—This species was a scarce migrant here, and only noted at infrequent intervals. My extreme dates of occurrence for the spring migration are February 16 (1929) and April 5 (1925), and for the fall migration October 29, (1925) and December 14 (1926).

Nettion carolinense. Green-winged Teal.—My one record for the occurrence of this species here is that of two birds seen February 14, 1927, in the Sandy Creek bottoms.

Querquedula discors. Blue-winged Teal.—This species was a fairly common migrant, small flocks being seen at frequent intervals throughout most of April and again in September. It was always interesting to note their arrival early in September when the weather was invariably hot and dry, and more suggestive of midsummer than fall. As a usual thing the flocks seen contained four or five birds, exceptions being a flock of 13 found feeding in a shallow pool in the open Sandy Creek bottoms April 16, 1926, and a flock of 10 at the same spot September 7, 1926. My extreme dates for occurrence in the spring are March 26 (1928) and April 27 (1928), and in the fall September 7 (1926) and October 15 (1926).

Spatula clypeata. Shoveller.—This species was found to be a rather scarce migrant, and was only noted in the spring. My few records for its occurrence are a flock of seven birds April 5, 1925 (Lake Kirota), a flock of five birds April 2, 1926 (Sandy Creek bottoms), a flock of four March 16, 1928 (city reservoir), a flock of nine April 12, 1928 (Sandy Creek bot-

oms), and a flock of twenty March 22, 1929 (Sandy Creek bottoms).

Aix sponsa. Wood Duck.—Although at first found to be rather scarce this species has increased perceptibly in numbers in recent years and can now be seen throughout the year on the Oconee River. Young recently out of the nest were reported to me early in May of 1927, and that it remained to breed that year was further verified by seeing two birds in the Sandy Creek bottoms July 22. My first definite winter record was that of three birds flushed from the edge of the river January 27, 1928.

Nyroca americana. Redhead.—This species was a scarce migrant, and only seen at infrequent intervals. My extreme records for the spring migration are March 15 (1925) and March 31 (1926), and for the fall migration November 4 (1924) and November 28 (1929).

Nyroca collaris. Ring-necked Duck.—Judging from actual records, this species could be considered a somewhat scarce migrant here, although for a time at least it was possibly confused with the Lesser Scaup. Almost invariably but one or two birds would be seen at any one spot, the one exception being a flock found March 9, 1928 on the city reservoir in which there were 13 birds, all males. My extreme dates for occurrence in the spring are March 5 (1929) and April 16 (1925), and in the fall October 30 (1929) and December 6 (1927).

NOTES AND NEWS

GEORGIA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

First Biennial Meeting

It was a happy coincidence that Milledgeville, historic town of Georgia, was chosen as the place of meeting for the first session of the Georgia Ornithological Society. Here Dr. Frank M. Chapman, at the age of eight, definitely began his study of birds which has resulted in the greatest contribution to ornithology made by any one person in the United States.

On April 3, sixty-five years later, more than eighty people were assembled to launch an organized state-wide movement for the study and conservation of birds in Georgia.

A lecture, illustrated with lantern slides, by Dr. Wallace Rogers, was the feature of the afternoon session. Miss Berna Jarrard exhibited some excellent kodak pictures of birds and a reel of movies on the Cedar Wax-wing.

At this session the Club voted to go on record as supporting legislation for the protection of hawks and owls, which question is being considered by all of the Eastern United States at this time.

By-laws for the Society were adopted which provided for additions to the staff of officers. Dr. Wallace Rogers was chosen first vice-president and Dr. J. H. DeLoach, second vice-president, and Miss Annie Pfeiffer historian-librarian.

After the banquet which was a very delightful occasion, members assembled for the evening session. The feature of this program was a lec-

ture on the heron family by Mr. Herbert L. Stoddard, illustrated with moving pictures.

The United States Biological Survey was represented by Mr. T. D. Burleigh who talked on the value of scientific collecting in Georgia; Mr. Harold Peters who emphasized the value of bird banding; and Mr. Earle R. Greene, who told something of the sanctuaries fostered by the Survey.

The Milledgeville Club, our hosts, set an example in hospitality and organization that will be a high mark for succeeding hosts to attain.

The college people were cordial and co-operative giving an excellent background for the session.

BY-LAWS OF THE GEORGIA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Article I.

The name of this society shall be GEORGIA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

Article II.

OBJECTS

1. To secure the co-operation of the various bird students and clubs over the state in gathering and disseminating accurate information of bird life within its boundaries.
2. To promote interest in and appreciation of the value of birds, both aesthetic and economic, which would insure wiser conservation of our bird life.
3. To stimulate and unite public sentiment toward legislative enactment for bird protection.
4. To provide opportunity for acquaintance and fellowship among those interested in nature.
5. To issue a quarterly publication as a means of furthering the ends above described.

Article III.

MEMBERS

The society elects by its Executive Committee—

Regular members, who pay an annual fee of one dollar.

Sustaining members, who pay an annual fee of five dollars.

Life members, who pay a single fee of twenty-five dollars.

Patrons—Any member may become a patron by paying one hundred dollars at one time.

Article IV.

OFFICERS

Section 1. The officers of the society shall consist of a president, 1st vice-president, 2nd vice-president, executive secretary, treasurer, historian-librarian, and regional vice-presidents not to exceed fifteen in number. Their duties shall be such as ordinarily devolve upon such officers.

Section 2. The above officers are to be elected annually at the October meeting, except the executive secretary.

Section 3. The executive secretary shall serve two years.

Section 4. The Executive Committee—This shall be composed of all

the officers. In case it is not practical to get all officers together because of wide distribution, the executive committee shall be composed of president, executive secretary, and treasurer together with five additional members selected by said officers.

Article V.

MEETINGS

Semi-annual meetings shall be held the first week-end in April and October. Places of meeting to be so arranged as to make it possible for those participating to become acquainted with bird life in all parts of the state.

Article VI.

AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended at the semi-annual meetings by two-thirds of the members present.

CHARTER MEMBERS OF THE GEORGIA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The following list of members is printed here for a double purpose: to acknowledge and check the receipt of dues, and to present our readers with the names and addresses of other Georgia bird students. If through some mistake your name has been omitted please notify us and it will be published later as a charter member. If any change of address should be made also notify us. Anyone desiring membership may send dues to the treasurer of the G. O. S., Miss Berma Jarrard, 54 Briarcliff Circle, Atlanta, Georgia.

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Florida Gallinule near Atlanta, Georgia.—On April 30, 1937, a Florida Gallinule (*Gallinula chloropus cachinnans*) was shown to me by Mr. Jacques Upshaw, of College Park, Ga. It had been brought to him by a small boy who had picked it up dead the day before. It was in good plumage and had no apparent injury.—Don Eyles, Biology Department, Emory University, Emory University, Ga.

Harris's Sparrow in Georgia.—Early on the morning of April 23, 1937, the writer, using the ordinary tunnel trap used in trapping ground-feeding birds, captured a Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*). The bird was trapped in company with a White-crowned Sparrow in a trap baited with chicken feed and placed among grape vines on the campus of the College of Agriculture, University of Georgia, Athens, Ga. The bird was a male in good health. Examination at skinning showed it to be free of both external and internal parasites. The skin is now preserved in the Zoological Museum of the University of Georgia, Athens, Ga. This is the first record of the occurrence of Harris's Sparrow in Georgia, and one of the very few records of the bird's occurrence east of the Mississippi River. The writer is indebted to Dr. Harry C. Oberholser, of the Bureau of Biological Survey, Washington, D. C., who confirmed the identification of the bird under discussion.—J. Fred Denton, Zoology Department, University of Ga., Athens, Ga.

THE ORIOLE

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EDITORIAL

In lieu of anything more pertinent for this page, your editors thought it might be desirable to review the contents of this issue in retrospective. It is with the idea that knowledge of personalities responsible for the production and of the significance of the matter in it, might make a series of scientific articles and notes more interesting.

The first article was written by Dr. E. E. Murphey, of Augusta, Georgia. We recently interviewed Dr. Murphy, who is of the old school of ornithology. We regard him as one of the most pleasing persons we have ever met. A brilliant conversationalist, he is also an ornithologist of greatest skill and has behind him decades of thorough-going bird work. Dr. Murphey was one of the late A. T. Wayne's closest friends. He can relate many stories of Wayne and others. Sometime we hope to persuade him to write us an article of reminiscences. Some of his tales are just too good to be kept locked in his mind.

The next article, of which only a portion is being printed in this issue, has been in the hands of the editors since late in 1935. It is the most complete work in existence on Georgia birds, even though it is a local list, and was written by a man that probably knows Georgia birds as well as anyone living. Thomas (Tom) D. Burleigh, of the Biological Survey, is his name, and he is one of the keenest and fastest working men we have ever met. The editors hope some time in the future, after serial publication in the Oriole, to bring the whole paper together in a pamphlet. The paper contains numerous first records for the state and should be in any self-respecting Georgia Library.

In the general notes is included a record for the Harris Sparrow, a first record for the state and a first first-record for The Oriole. Along with the Harris Sparrow, which was recorded by Fred Denton, who is one of Georgia's best ornithologists, was a white-crowned Sparrow. We were fortunate enough to examine the bird and see for ourselves one of Georgia's rarest birds.

The above has no moral—generally a characteristic of editorials—except that ornithologists are, after all, human beings and, we think, a group of the most cultured variety.

At a meeting of the executive committee of the G. O. S., in Atlanta, on June 4, it was decided to hold the next biennial meeting of the Society in Savannah on October 9 and 10. It is hoped that a large number of members will attend. A more definite announcement of place of meeting and program will be published in the September Oriole.