

THE ORIOLE

A Quarterly Journal of Georgia Ornithology : Official Organ of the
Georgia Ornithological Society



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JUNE, 1939

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ORPHANS OF THE TILLANDSIA

By Anna Stowell Bassett

Along the coast of Georgia where Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) is abundant, certain birds adapt it to their need and build their nests in it, safe from many of their enemies. Orchard Orioles, Parula and Yellow-throated Warblers are among the number. The young birds are truly cradled in the tree tops, swayed by every breeze. This story is of a cradle that fell.



At Belfast, Bryan County, Georgia, the morning of June 19, 1938 was very warm. Long streamers of moss hung straight from the tall oaks, unstirred by the least breath of air. Parulas were singing, but the Yellow-throated Warblers seemed too busy to sing as they slowly searched the moss for food, so intent on their search they forgot to be shy.

Toward evening a wave of cool air came in with a high wind that blew down

much moss, one strand of which containing a small nest was blown into a neighboring yard where a hungry calf ate the moss and exposed the dainty nest which was rescued by a young man. One baby bird was dead. The other three did not have their eyes open and were naked, save for pin-feathers on heads and shoulders.

The neighbors united in soliciting me to take them home to Savannah and care for them. There was no way to return them to their mother, rain was coming and a hungry cat waiting, so I consented to see what I could do, although it seemed a hopeless task.

The task undertaken, the first problem was to keep the nest upright and the baby birds in it, the next was to keep them warm. The top of a thermos bottle solved both problems. The nest fitted nicely into the closed end of the top, leaving room above it for a light pad of cotton to cover them.

The third problem was what to feed them. Feeding these Yellow-throated Warbler babies was an experiment, but was fairly successful. Their food consisted of the yolk of hard-boiled eggs, slender bits (small-worm size) of

raw meat, chicken, lamb, liver, veal and giblets, cooked crab meat and fish roe, a little cracker and sweet milk and what natural food we could find—tiny angle worms, green worms and insects. With this diet they needed plenty of water, which was given them by a medicine dropper.



Cuts Donated By Author

A pair of small manicure tweezers took the place of the parent bird's bill in feeding them and removing ordure from the nest. The latter being enclosed in a delicate membranous sac, is easily removed and the nest kept clean.

When the pad of cotton was lifted from the nest at 6:30 A. M. June 20th, three pairs of bright eyes met my sight, three little mouths were stretched wide for food and the pin-feathers had become tiny feathers, covering the heads and shoulders of the little birds. They were fed at half-hour intervals throughout the day. After each feeding the little heads dropped to the edge of the nest and they slept till the next feeding time. They also began to call softly and to preen their new feathers.

On June 21st, heads and shoulders were well-covered with feathers and their tail feathers measured one-fourth inch. They continued preening their feathers and began to flutter and stretch their wings and to call more lustily for food. One was weighed. Its weight was one-half ounce.

June 22nd: All left the nest which had been placed in a covered half-bushel peach basket. The smallest and weakest did not leave the nest until late in the day. They were very active, climbing up the sides of the basket and trying to fly out of it. Two of them succeeding, one flew fully six feet to a screened window. They cared no more for the nest and perched side by side for the night.

June 23rd: They were confined between two screens in an open window with moss on the window sill and a tiny twig for a perch. They were also taken to the camera shop to have their pictures taken.

June 25th: They fed with quivering wings and eager chipping, holding their heads down to be fed instead of up, as they did at first. Also, they were allowed their freedom in the room. After feeding they perched quietly, often out of sight, but betrayed their hiding places at feeding time. The last remnant of down disappeared.

June 26: All three little birds were well and happy. All were hungry and their notes when hungry were sweet and trilling, reminding one a little of a canary's trill. When they flew, their flight was upward as high as the ceiling. The longest tail measured three-fourths inch.

After June 27th they were free in the room all day, but liked to sit in the east window. They were wholly unafraid, alighting on our heads or shoulders

with entire confidence. They were fed at intervals of one to two hours and began to make some effort to take their food from the tweezers.

July 1st: Despite all our care, the smallest bird met with an accident. With a chirp, a gasp and a flutter, its little life went out.

July 3rd: The two remaining birds were taken back to Belfast and placed in a room with a moss-covered oak branch. At once they began to search the undersides of the oak leaves and run their bills along the edges of them. They picked up and ate a few ants, ate a few ant pupae from a paper plate and slept that night in the moss with their heads tucked under their wings.

July 6: Another bird met with a little accident that resulted in its death the next day. Upon examination it showed a line of pin-feathers on either side of the sternum.

The remaining bird seemed to crave insects and hunted for them, snapping up an occasional fly. It relished small green worms from the mulberry tree, beat a three-fourths inch moth to death and swallowed it, went into the kitchen where crabs were being picked and helped itself.

Its natural food made it discontented with what we had been feeding it. On July 11th after eating a few green worms it became really tiresome, chattering and begging all day. It even followed me into another room, perched upon my shoulder and poured its discontent into my ear. It took long flights and drank drops of water from the end of the medicine dropper.

A family consultation was held and Bonaventure Cemetery was decided upon as the safest place to free it, so the next morning, July 12th, it was given a hearty breakfast. After a trip to Mr. Foltz's studio to have its picture taken, we drove to the cemetery and Dr. Bassett placed it on a low-hanging oak limb. It looked about a moment, then flew high in the tree. At our call it started to fly down, but saw something it wished to eat, so we left it to its freedom.

The last two birds differed in plumage and notes. One had much more white about the head, the other had larger white markings on the tail feathers. The calling of one was in one pitch, the call of the other finished at a lower pitch.

A careful examination of the nest showed the outside was of tillandsia fitted together, then a very thin layer of soft dried grass, two small pieces of tissue paper, four chicken feathers, two small pieces of cotton cloth, a little chicken down, a layer of brown palm fibre, a thick layer of plant down and a lining of the softest and finest vegetable down. A specimen sent to Washington was pronounced to be from the flowers of the tillandsia. The seed vessels of these tiny flowers contain the fine filaments the Yellow-throated Warblers collect for their nests.

SOMETHING ABOUT BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

By Wallace Rogers

Bird photography is not only an interesting hobby but an exhilarating sport as well. It has the advantage of taking one out into the woods and fields, thereby developing powers of perception and a love of the beauties of nature, not to say anything of the patience and persistence it must of necessity call forth. It provides good physical exercise. A long walk laden with the inevitable tripod, camera and other accessories, with an occasional climb in order to investigate a nest in the tree tops, gives zest to the appetite, tightens flabby muscles, and helps to clear the cobwebs from the brain. Per-

haps the best result will be the initiation into the inner secrets of the bird's daily life with the creation of a deep regard for his life and safety.

It is sometimes stated that bird photography has been overdone. It may have been badly done, but not overdone. There is a wide field for the straight record as well as the picture with true artistic merit. So it seems to me that bird photography would appeal strongly to all amateur photographers.

A few words of caution should be given those who wish to photograph birds. Unless one approaches the birds with a sympathetic knowledge of their habits and peculiarities it is likely to do them much harm. Some are very shy and sensitive. Sometimes they will abandon the nest on the slightest provocation, and again a clumsy attempt to photograph the parent bird feeding the young fledglings will cause the young to leave the nest prematurely to the loss of their lives. The behaviour of birds in this respect is most inconsistent. For example: one Cardinal may come and go without much notice of the camera or the photographer, while the next Cardinal one tries may be so shy that a picture is almost impossible. A failure to understand this will result in abandoned nests and starving young birds. Young birds must be fed frequently. Often a bungling would-be-bird-photographer will cause the parents to feed the young birds at intervals so long that they not only suffer hunger but are actually starved. So a sympathetic understanding is the first requisite of a bird photographer.

In the matter of equipment a good blind from which to photograph is well-nigh indispensable. Some photographers use a long shutter release, others remove the nest to a more favorable location (an abominable practice from the standpoint of the lover of birds), but neither of these is so satisfactory as the blind. This may be of some neutral colored, inexpensive cloth. A big advertising umbrella with a strip of green denim fastened around the edges with slits for the lens and for observation, with a hole in the top for ventilation will serve splendidly.

As to the camera, one that will permit the use of a ground glass for focusing would be first choice. Of course the range finder type can be used very successfully in the photography of nests. A symposium of ten leading photographers of birds and animals in America indicates that all of them use cameras of the Graflex or Speed Graphic type. The favorite picture size is $3\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$ inches. The lenses used on a camera taking a picture of this size would be an anastigmat of six or seven inch focus, working at F: 4.5, and a telephoto lens of twelve or fourteen inch focus, with an aperture of F:5.6 or F:55. An outfit of this type would run into money, however, good work can be done with much less expensive equipment.

In the matter of sensitive material one will no doubt have his own personal choice. Panchromatic material is best for nests and eggs since one can use a filter and get better color values. For birds themselves, a fast film is needed. Select one with a maximum of speed and a minimum of grain. As to exposure, no definite rule can be given but a reliable meter, preferably of the photo cell type, should be a constant companion. The changing light conditions met with in the locations where nests are found cannot be estimated by guess work.

Remember that patience and skill will more than offset the lack of expensive equipment. If one loves birds the finest collecting that can be done is the photographic record of nests, eggs, and birds. The work should be done sympathetically and no injury done, since "a bird in the bush is worth two in the hand."

EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT

MABEL T. ROGERS
G. S. C. W., Milledgeville

Editors

HARRIET RAINWATER
Allen Couch School, Atlanta

This is the last issue of THE ORIOLE before our schools start in the fall. The editors are hoping that those of you who teach are planning to use your opportunities this summer to learn ten or more birds before you take up your work again. If you return to your classroom with an interest in and an enthusiasm for teaching bird study it may help you to know of the experience of Miss Louisa Noyes, who, although a new teacher, had great success in such a venture. Here is her story in almost the same words in which it was given to me.

"One day last fall a Cardinal got into the eighth grade classroom. The boys and girls were naturally excited and came into my class discussing it. Since I was interested in birds I let them talk about it and asked them about other birds. They seemed so interested that I suggested that we might have a club to study birds. This suggestion was taken up with enthusiasm. We gradually got the club organized and registered with the Junior Audubon Society. We chose officers to conduct the programs, and formulated a code of ideals and regulations which was made up from suggestions by the children.

"We met once a week while school was in session. This summer they plan to meet once a month at the homes of different members. Several Saturdays we went on hikes and took picnic lunches. We also had other parties. We played one game that perhaps you might like to use sometime. We called it Bird Bingo.

"Have each person rule off (or fold and crease) a sheet of paper into sixteen squares, four rows of four squares each. Then each one should fill in his squares with the names of any sixteen common birds that come to mind. Have a time limit on this part. The person in charge then reads off the names of birds from a list prepared previously. Each one marks a square when the name of that bird is called and the person who first gets four in a row calls BINGO! A prize may be offered (not advised by the editor) or points may be given the group checking the most rows."

The success of bird study depends on the approach. The project above illustrates this in an excellent manner. The interest of the children was running riot before the organization of a club was mentioned. Then they defined their own purpose or plans in the form of a code. This insured a thorough understanding of the project and gave the children a feeling of responsibility for the club because it was their own.

We could have given you their code but that would have spoiled the creativeness of the project for you. The fact that each was free to contribute to the regulations made this an educative experience and set the stage for a real joy in bird study. Of course, Cardinals will not visit all eighth grade rooms but some other event just as exciting will come to the teacher on the alert for a creative approach.

This is one teacher's approach—what is yours? In our next issue we plan to give other practical suggestions to those starting bird study. We hope that you will send in questions you wish discussed, and that, in turn you will send in plans which you have tried with success. Let this be a clearing house for leaders of junior clubs.

NOTES AND NEWS

The Fifth Semi-annual Meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society held in Brunswick April 15 and 16, 1939 was as enjoyable as one could wish. Brunswick itself being a historic and romantic place, the Oglethorpe Hotel as headquarters and the charming hospitality of Mrs. Berrie and her committee made us all admit that G. O. S. meetings are better and better each time we meet.

The business session at 4:00 p. m. in the drawing room was well attended. Reports of activities indicate growth and achievement on the part of both individuals and groups. Reportorial highlights from regional vice-presidents as follows:

Milledgeville, Mrs. Sam Anderson: Sponsoring a lecture by Dr. Arthur A. Allen, bird-banding, and field work.

Savannah, Mrs. Victor H. Bassett: Unusual observations on the Oven-bird, January 31, 1939.

Augusta, Dr. Eugene E. Murphey: Telegraphed regrets upon not being able to attend—no report.

Atlanta, Don Eyles (absent from business meeting): Report by Mrs. Oliver included sponsoring an exhibition of bird pictures in oil by Athos Menaboni as the contribution of the G. O. S. to Wild Life Restoration Week, sponsoring a lecture by Dr. Arthur A. Allen, and the revision of check list of Birds of the Atlanta Area by Bill Griffin and George Sciple.

Statesboro, Dr. R. J. H. DeLoach: A new club of 26 members interested in field work.

The transfer of Earle Green to Key West gave the club some anxiety but all agreed that he should continue as president until the fall meeting in spite of non-residence in the state.

The report of the treasurer, Ray C. Werner, showed a balance of \$87.74 and all renewals not yet in, with 104 paid up members including six life members as follows:

Miss Hattie Rainwater, Atlanta
Dr. R. C. Rhodes, Emory University
Mrs. Hugh H. Harris, Emory University
Miss Mabel T. Rogers, Milledgeville
Mr. Dan Henderson, Augusta
Mr. Joseph Parsons, Savannah

The resignation of Ivan Tomkins as editor of the Oriole was regretted. Mrs. Hugh H. Harris was chosen to fill the vacancy and Mr. Hugh H. Harris to become business manager.

An exhibit of bird pictures in water color and pencil sketches by Robert Norris of Fitzgerald was of unusual interest.

Miss Rainwater, chairman of the committee on meeting places, announced the next meeting at Vogel Park October 15-16, having received a cordial invitation from Charles N. Elliott, Supervisor of State Parks.

At six-thirty more than sixty members and guests assembled in the private dining room of the Oglethorpe for dinner and further entertainment. Delegates were present from Emory University, Thomson, Waynesboro, Folkston, Sylvania, Statesboro, Savannah, Atlanta, Brunswick, Milledgeville, Fitzgerald, and Key West, Florida. After greetings and introductions by President Green, Dr. DeLoach was presented as toastmaster. Mr. Potter F. Gould welcomed the group to the Golden Isles of Georgia, a paradise for bird

study. Mr. Robert McLanahan of the U. S. Biological Survey, led an open forum on drainage and its relation to wildlife. Dr. M. E. Winchester of Brunswick and Mr. Don Eyles of Atlanta, participated in the discussion. President Greene spoke on the present condition of the Great White Heron at Key West.

The surprise of the evening was the presentation of Sir Wilfred Grenfell, noted for his welfare work in Labrador and his writings about the same. Sir Wilfred spoke briefly of his work in the far north. Mr. George Dorsey charmed the group with his imitations of the songs and calls of some of our common birds following with an explanation, by means of charts, of his theory of method of writing bird songs. The program closed with several reels of moving pictures of bird life.

Perfect weather and a crowd of "inlanders" looking forward to new thrills in the study of shore birds gave the field trip a good start—going by car to the Fishing-banks and from there by boat to Pelican Island where Willets were numerous and nesting in almost every clump of rushes and Oyster Catchers and Plovers common.

At noon the group returned to St. Simon's Island for lunch and such a beautiful lunch it was! spread under the Live Oaks near the pier. All were loathe to depart for home with Painted Buntings and other land birds calling from nearby thickets.—Harriet M. Oliver, Executive Secretary.

The Spring Season in the Atlanta Area as a whole seems to have been about average. The following rare birds were recorded: Bonaparte's Gull—one bird on waterworks lakes in company with two Herring Gulls and Scaup Ducks, March 30 (Sciple, Griffin). Least Flycatcher—one bird observed closely, identified by its unmistakable call, April 29 (Sciple, Griffin). Horned Lark—15 birds, March 4. Short-billed Marsh Wren—one bird shot near South River, April 20. Apparently this is the second record for the area; however, closer observation will probably reveal this species more common. Orange-crowned Warbler—single birds seen on February 4, April 20, and April 29 and a dead bird on April 29 which was sent to Washington by Bob McLannahan and identified by Oberholser.

Pine Siskins were common again this spring as they have been for the past three years. Despite a careful search for them in fall and winter none was noted until February 18. After this, however, they gradually increased in numbers so that by the first two weeks in April flocks of up to 100 individuals could be seen daily. They were last seen on April 25. Other species more abundant than usual were the Ring-necked Duck, House Wren, and Cape May Warbler.

Arrivals and departures for most species were on schedule even though a number of new extremes were established. New early spring records were as follows: Blue-winged Teal, March 18; Wood Thrush, March 30; Gray-cheeked Thrush, May 6; Magnolia Warbler, April 23; Louisiana Water-Thrush, March 9 (Eyles); Hooded Warbler, March 22; Baltimore Oriole, April 23; Blue Grosbeak, April 20. New late spring dates: Loon, May 18; Mallard, April 5; Osprey, April 29; Greater Yellow-legs, May 18; House Wren, May 4; Nor. Water-thrush, May 23; Bobolink, May 18; Vesper Sparrow, May 5; Swamp Sparrow, May 13; Song Sparrow, May 9.—Bill Griffin, Emory University.

The meeting at Brunswick was about as enjoyable as one could wish. Since coming back I have collected two specimens of the Northern Night-hawk—it has always worried me if the northern race migrates through ahead of our local birds. Now, I am sure of it. The first bird was seen April 18th. You will also remember that we saw no Least Terns at Brunswick. On Tuesday morning, April 18th, as we came down river, a log drifted by with eight of them riding on it, probably first migrants of the spring.—Ivan R. Tomkins, U. S. Dredge Morgan.

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings to all members of the Georgia Ornithological Society! It seems a long time since that memorable meeting in Brunswick. I am sure that everyone who was there had a great time and felt well repaid for attending. We were all inspired by the dinner meeting, the art exhibit, that breakfast, the wonderful field trip and the final luncheon under the trees overlooking the ocean on St. Simon's Island. For the writer, it was very gratifying to meet so many old friends and to again be on the soil of Georgia with them studying Georgia bird life. Although the Florida keys are extremely interesting and the avifauna a continual delight, some choice bird friends are missing entirely—not a single note of the Wood Thrush to be heard, no "yank" of the Nuthatch, no flash of the Tanager, no plaintive call of the Bluebird. Although living in a Garden of Eden in many ways, much is lacking.

Let us all look forward to the fall meeting in the mountains where it is expected the largest gathering of members yet will occur. Let's make it the best and biggest we have had. Every one should be there, not only to enjoy the scenery and the bird life, but come prepared to elect new officers for next year, bring new ideas and take part in all activities of our Society. Yes, it is a long way from Key West to Vogel Park but your president expects to be rightt here.

Earle R. Greene.

THE ORIOLE SPONSORS FOURTH OF JULY CENSUS

For years the magazine, Bird Lore, has been sponsoring an annual Christmas census of birds. Georgia has been well represented in this national undertaking, and over a period of years much has been added to our knowledge of winter birds by this activity. There has, however, been very little study of the relative abundance of birds of the state during the summer months. It is for this reason that a Fourth of July state-wide census is suggested. Perhaps a mid-summer census would bring to light new and interesting aspects of ornithology. In discussing the possibilities of such a census with a number of the members of the G. O. S. the consensus of opinion was that it would be a good thing and the editors of The Oriole agreed to sponsor this activity.

The same rules that are used for the Christmas census are to be used for this. The date, locality and county, names of observers, temperature, weather, distance and time, species and number of individuals and totals, should be recorded. The time for the census will be any day (dawn to darkness) from Saturday, July 1 through Wednesday, July 5, inclusive. Come on, let's really put this over and learn more about our summer birds. All records are to be in the mail not later than July 15. Address all communications to Bill Griffin, 135 Peachtree Way, N. E., Atlanta, Ga.

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