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THE ABUNDANCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF SOME SUMMER BIRDS OF TRAY MOUNTAIN, GEORGIA

By J. FRED DENTON and DOROTHY NEAL

Tray Mountain is one of the larger as well as one of the higher mountains forming the Blue Ridge in Georgia. Rising from the plateau near Robertstown (el. 1600 ft.) it attains a height of 4430 feet (TVA Topographical Survey) at the top of the highest of its three peaks. The Southwestern slope of the mountain rises rather abruptly to 3000 feet then ascends more gradually for six miles, in a northeasterly direction to the highest peak, the more southwestern of the three. Both the sides and the top of the mountain are situated within the Chattahoochee National Forest and are heavily forested with fairly mature timber. In the ravines along the small creeks hemlocks and white pine are the predominant trees, while on the drier ridges at low altitudes Virginia and shortleaf pines are found. On the higher slopes the forest is deciduous, consisting of various oaks, black locust, and hickory. There are no clearings other than the road and a small picnic area at 3500 feet so that birds that frequent such areas are absent.

Access to Tray is easy by means of the Tray Mountain Road, a forest service road that is maintained in fair condition at all times. This road leaves State Highway 75 one mile north of Robertstown and ascends the southwestern slope through White Branch ravine. After attaining the brow it passes along the crest for seven miles before beginning its descent of the northeastern slope at Tray Gap. The Appalachian Trail passes along the top of the mountain for several miles affording a good trail for exploration afoot.

In 1941, one of us (D.P.N.) constructed a summer home on the southwestern prominence of the mountain at 3000 feet. Since that time observations have been made regularly of the summer birds in the vicinity of the house with frequent trips to more distant parts of the mountain. Denton has visited the mountain briefly on several occasions, mostly at times other than the height of the breeding season. However, it was possible for both of us to spend the entire week of June 13 - 20, 1949, and May 30 - June 1, 1950, studying the birds of the mountain. An effort was made to cover as much of the mountain as possible in order to determine

what birds breed there. In addition, special attention was paid to altitudinal distribution and habitat preferred by each species. Some of the more interesting results of this study as well as previous observations are presented below.

Tray is situated so that it lies partly within three counties. The southwestern part straddles the Towns-White County line while the highest peak sits approximately atop the junction formed by these two counties with Habersham. Because of the uncertainty of these political divisions no attempt has been made to assign records to any particular county.

Red-tailed Hawk: *Buteo jamaicensis*. Although Tray is heavily wooded and seemingly not very good habitat, at least one pair of these hawks has chosen to make it their permanent home. They have been seen frequently on or along the road from the bottom up to 3200 feet. Apparently they secure most, if not all, of their food in the road or along the shoulders. No nest was located, but an immature was seen on August 12, 1949, which along with the constant presence of the adults suggests strongly that they nested on the mountain.

Broad-winged Hawk: *Buteo platypterus*. This hawk for which there is a scarcity of records from northeast Georgia has been seen and heard frequently from the house. On May 29, 1949, William W. Griffin observed an immature along the road at 1700 feet and thought that a pair nested in the vicinity. During the succeeding summer a pair was observed repeatedly at the same place.

Ruffed Grouse: *Bonasa umbellus*. This species which is apparently not subject to periodic fluctuations in numbers in this area has been common on Tray for the last five years. It apparently is not partial to any particular type of habitat since it has been observed in most types from 1800 to 3800 feet. Small chicks were seen early in June, 1948, and on June 18, 1949. On August 6 and 15, 1949, broods of half-grown birds were noted following hens.

Eastern Turkey: *Meleagris gallapavo*. This bird which at one time was very scarce on the mountain has increased under fairly adequate legal protection during recent years until it now is fairly common. The birds which range widely in search of food have been observed in various types of habitat from 2100 to 3400 feet.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: *Sphyrapicus varius*. This species was found nesting, the first nest from the state, on Tray by Neal on June 14, 1947, at 3850 feet (Neal, 1947). Since that time a sharp lookout has been kept for the bird and in June, 1949, a special search was made for it but to no avail. Though strange it may seem not a single other bird has ever been seen on the mountain at any time either in winter or in summer.

Acadian Flycatcher: *Empidonax virescens*. This little flycatcher breeds commonly on Tray along streams and in marshy or damp pockets

from the bottom to an altitude of 3500 feet. Stevenson (1941) recorded it as high in summer as 3800 feet near Highlands, North Carolina. Apparently the absence of suitable habitat above 3500 feet is the limiting factor on Tray.

Carolina Wren: *Thryothorus ludovicianus*. Somewhat to our surprise we found this species a fairly scarce breeding bird on Tray. It was observed from the bottom to 2200 feet but was not found above this altitude except at Neal's house (el. 3000 ft.) where a pair nested in the small pump house. Young recently out of the nest were seen there on August 29, 1947. No explanation of the limited distribution of this species on Tray is apparent. The species breeds up to 4000 feet at Highlands, North Carolina, and in the Great Smokies (Stevenson and Stupka, 1948).

Winter Wren: *Troglodytes troglodytes*. Since several "northern" species breed on Tray it seemed possible that this species might also. A careful search was made for it but none was found, so we feel reasonably certain that it does not breed on the mountain at the present time.

Robin: *Turdus migratorius*. This species which occurs as a breeding bird on Enotah Bald and other of the higher mountains is conspicuous by its absence on Tray. Not a single breeding pair could be located. Possibly the lack of clearings and the thick undergrowth explained its absence.

Veery: *Hylocichla fuscescens*. Although sharply restricted to a narrow belt lying between 3800 and 4400 feet near the top of the mountain, this thrush was found to be fairly common within this area. The habitat here is characterized by thickets of rhododendron and other shrubs interspersed with or underlying fairly open deciduous forest. This habitat is very similar to that in which Burleigh (1927) found the species breeding on Enotah (Brasstown) Bald. The altitudes at which the bird breeds on Tray and Enotah agree very closely although it occurs a little lower (3600 feet) on Enotah.

Swainson's Warbler: *Limnethlypis swainsonii*. The discovery of this species along the road in White Branch ravine at 1700 feet has already been reported (Denton, 1948). Since then considerable time has been spent attempting to learn more of this bird. When the area was first visited in the spring on May 8, 1949, and May 9, 1950, the birds were already there, three singing males on the first occasion, four on the latter. These birds seemed to have established territories which centered around small alder-lined streams which dropped down the side of the ravine to empty at right angles into White Branch. Repeated searches for active nests by us and others have failed although an old nest apparently of this species was found on May 31, 1950. The same day, while quietly watching a singing male, a female emerged from the thick undergrowth and flew to his perch on a low bare limb. Copulation followed, and the female disappeared in the undergrowth.

That this is a breeding colony of birds seems unquestionable now. The fact that the birds have been present for four consecutive years in the

same locality and have not been seen elsewhere on the mountain, that one mated pair was seen copulating, and that one apparently used nest was found is convincing evidence to us.

Worm-eating Warbler: *Helmitheros vermivorus*. This species was found to be fairly common breeding in ravines near streams at altitudes of 1700 to 2500 feet. On June 25, 1947, an adult was noted feeding young in a nest in a rhododendron thicket along the stream near the big falls, while on June 10, 1949, an adult was observed feeding bob-tailed young recently out of the nest. At Highlands, North Carolina, this species was found in summer up to 4200 feet by Stevenson (1941), but on Tray it is apparently limited by the absence of suitable ravines at higher altitudes.

Black-throated Blue Warbler: *Dendroica caerulescens*. This is one of the most common breeding warblers of the mountain. It was found frequently in fairly open woods from 2700 feet to the top. On both June 18, 1948, and June 20, 1949, adults were seen feeding young out of the nest.

Black-throated Green Warbler: *Dendroica virens*. In our experience this species was restricted to a rather limited area between 1700 and 2000 feet within the ravine through which the road ascends. In this area the bird seemed as common as anywhere in the State. In the bottom of the ravine in this area hemlock and white pine, along with chestnut and other oaks, are the dominant trees. Higher up on the sides of the ravine Virginia pines in almost pure stands occur.

During June, 1949, a special search of the area was made to find the first nest of this warbler in Georgia. Although this was unsuccessful there is little doubt of the birds' breeding there since, in addition to being present during the nesting season, adults were observed feeding young recently out of the nest on June 18, 1948, and carrying food on June 18, 1949.

Blackburnian Warbler: *Dendroica fusca*. This warbler was fairly common, occurring during the breeding season in open woods from 3500 feet to the top of the mountain. On May 16, 1948, Fern Doris and Lucille Rotchford discovered a nest at the cheese dairy picnic area (3500 feet). This nest like the one reported by Odum (1945) was built in a large white oak. It was situated near the tip of a branch about forty feet from the ground and directly over the road. The contents on this date were not determined, but on June 3 the adults were feeding large young in the nest. On both June 18, 1948, and June 18, 1949, adults were observed feeding young out of the nest, on the latter occasion at the very top of the mountain.

Chestnut-sided Warbler: *Dendroica pensylvanica*. This species was found to be one of the most common breeding warblers on Tray, occurring both on brushy slopes and in open woods from 3000 feet to the top of the mountain. On June 17, 1949, a nest with three eggs was found two feet

up in a laurel bush growing on the side of a logging road at 3000 feet. The female was incubating on this date and on June 20 when the nest was visited again.

Kentucky Warbler: *Oporornis formosus*. This warbler was rather uncommon on the mountain during the nesting season. Only two colonies were discovered. One found on June 17, 1949, was located along a creek in an open brushy ravine at 3000 feet and contained at least three pairs, while the other located in White Branch ravine at 1700 feet was estimated to contain five pairs on May 31, 1950.

Yellow-breasted Chat: *Icteria virens*. This species, which is fairly common and occurs to the very top of some of the higher mountains with brushy peaks (i.e. Enotah Bald), was very scarce on Tray. Only a single pair has been found on the mountain, this in White Branch ravine at 1700 feet. On May 31, 1950, these birds were feeding four young about four days old in a nest located in a laurel bush about three feet from the ground.

Canada Warbler: *Wilsonia canadensis*. It was a pleasant surprise to find this species breeding in the scrubby woods and rhododendron thickets from 4200 feet to the top of the mountain. On June 17, 1949, five pairs were located and a male in breeding condition was collected. Several of the birds including a pair carrying food displayed behaviour on this date which indicated unquestionably that they were nesting although no nest was found. On June 17, 1950, a pair was seen feeding young hardly able to fly while another male was noted carrying food. Burleigh (1925) found this Warbler breeding above 4000 feet on Enotah Bald. It also occurs in summer on Rabun Bald and Blood Mountain (Howell, 1936) at approximately the same altitudes.

American Redstart: *Setophaga ruticilla*. This species for some unexplained reason was uncommon and spottedly distributed during the breeding season. It was found only on bushy slopes or in fairly open woods from 3000 to 3500 feet. On June 17, 1949, an adult was observed feeding young out of the nest.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: *Phaeucticus ludovicianus*. This species was found to be fairly common, occurring in fairly open woods near small clearings or along the road from 3000 to 4430 feet. On June 16, 1949, a nest was discovered 30 feet up in a chestnut oak standing beside the road at 3500 feet. The male was incubating at the time. On June 14, 1947, an adult was noted carrying food at Tray Gap.

Carolina Junco: *Junco hyemalis*. This species, which is a permanent resident on Tray, was found to be uncommon during the breeding season when it was restricted to the scrubby woods and rhododendron thickets occurring from 3850 feet to the top of the mountain. On May 28, 1949, W. W. Griffin noted a pair displaying typical "near-nest" behavior, while

on June 17, 1949, the authors observed adults feeding young out of the nest. The habitat and elevation at which this species occurs on Tray corresponds well with that described by Burleigh (1925) for it on Enotah Bald. However, Burleigh did not find it breeding below 4000 feet.

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GENERAL NOTES

THE MOUNTAIN VIREO BREEDING IN SOUTHERN WILKES COUNTY, GEORGIA, A FURTHER EXTENSION OF ITS RANGE IN THE LOWER PIEDMONT.—In reporting the breeding of the Mountain Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius alticola*) at Athens recently Odum. (*Oriole* 13: 17-20, 1948) reviewed what was known of the invasion of the Piedmont of Georgia by this species. The present note adds another bit to our knowledge of this spectacular event.

On June 22, 1949, I set out to determine if this vireo bred in the extensive tracts of second-growth pine which line U. S. Highway 78 between Thomson and Washington. After two unsuccessful forays into the woods a stop was made about noon at a point 15.4 miles north of Thomson and just within Wilkes County. Immediately on cutting the motor a Solitary Vireo was heard singing about twenty-five yards from the highway. This bird was located and watched for 30 minutes hoping it would reveal its nest. It, however, was enjoying a period of loafing during which it fed occasionally and sang frequently but gave no indication of the whereabouts of the nest. It was collected and proved to be a male in breeding condition. It had a prominent brood patch and testes that measured 5 mm.

in length. While observing this bird I was aware of another singing less than 100 yards away.

On May 30, 1950, I revisited this area at 10:30 A. M. In the same territory in which the above male was collected another male was singing. Also, a short distance away a second male sang. After I had been watching the first male for a short time a female appeared and he pursued her about the territory. Apparently copulation took place. A little later I squeaked and the second male appeared in the same tree with the pair in whose territory I was standing. A chase soon followed and I left.

The habitat in this breeding area is similar to that in the other localities in the Piedmont where this species has been found breeding except that it is less mature and contains less deciduous understory. The area contains an almost pure stand of second-growth loblolly and short-leaf pines. The largest trees measure only 8 in. D.B.H. while the majority of them are only 4 in. D.B.H. There is no understory at all under the pines, and no hardwoods in the area except along an erosion ditch that runs through it. Along the ditch are dogwood, elm, persimmon, and sweet gum saplings of approximately the same age as the pines. The soil type is bright red, heavy clay. Bird associates noted in the area were Prairie Warbler, Alabama Towhee, Bachman's, and Field Sparrows. The distance of this area from the Fall Line, about 16 miles, is almost identical with the distances from the Fall Line of the places on the Piedmont Wildlife Refuge and in Upson County where this vireo was found breeding.—J. FRED DENTON, 1510 Pendleton Road, Augusta, Georgia.

AN OCCURRENCE OF BREWER'S BLACKBIRD NEAR CARTERSVILLE, GEORGIA—On April 1, 1951, in the course of waterfowl observations, the author found two adult male Brewer's Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) feeding in a damp pasture at Lake Aubrey, near Cartersville, Georgia. The birds were first seen on the ground at a considerable distance, and were in the closest association with feeding cattle. Upon inspection it was found that they were the quite distinctive *cyanocephalus*. No collection was made, but the birds were observed in strong sunlight at a distance of about 50 feet with 7 x 50 binoculars.

It is believed by the writer that this species has been thoroughly uncommon in the Atlanta and other nearby areas during the period of his observations there (1936-1941 and 1946-June, 1951). General reports of its not unusual occurrence, unconfirmed by specimens, should be accepted with caution in some cases, in his opinion. It is probable that the species is extending its range eastward and will occur more commonly in Georgia in the near future.—GEORGE W. SCIPLE, *Wildlife Research Laboratory, Denver, Colorado*.

REMARKS ON GEORGIA RECORDS OF SHARP-TAILED SPARROWS AND THEIR RELATION TO OUR NEED FOR QUANTITATIVE DATA.—In our Preliminary Check-list and Bibliography, *Birds of Geor-*

gia (Greene, *et al*, 1945), the Acadian Sharp-tailed Sparrow, *Ammospiza caudacuta subvirgata*, is listed as having been recorded by the present writer at St. Simons Island (*Oriole*, 6:24-25, 1941) and by Ivan Tomkins (from the Savannah region). Two other localities should be mentioned for this race: First, Peters (*Ann. Carnegie Mus.*, 29: 201-210, 1942) registers one specimen from Georgia, as follows: "Camden Co., 1 female, April 4, 1877." Secondly, Cooke (*Auk*, 25: 319, 1908) states that "this subspecies . . . was found by Mr. Helme as a common winter resident at Cumberland Island, Georgia, and by Mr. Worthington as equally common at Amelia Island, Florida." The Cumberland Island occurrence is mentioned in *Birds of Georgia*, but only in the bibliography; it should be incorporated in the annotation pertaining to this subspecies.

The James Bay Sharp-tailed Sparrow, *A. C. altera*, is included in the State list on the basis of "a single specimen recorded by Peters (Peters 1942 [*loc. cit.*]), as follows: 'Georgia, Camden County, 1 female, April 7, 1877.'" Both the locality and date are quoted erroneously; the record, according to Peters, should be: "Georgia, Sapelo Island, 1 female, Dec. 14, 1887 (M.C.Z.)." This correction should be noted in the Check-list and bibliography (pages 68 and 97) of *Birds of Georgia*.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, *A. c. nelsoni*, was treated in Peters' study, also, and several specific dates and places of Georgia-collected specimens are furnished therein. These records, among others, ought to be cited in later, more extensive treatments of the status of the races of Sharp-tailed Sparrow in Georgia.

Such extensive treatments as include, for example, actual lists of extant, racially identified specimens are strongly to be encouraged, for only in this way can we come fully to appreciate relative abundance and differential winter distribution of the races of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow in Georgia. Similarly does this hold for other multiform, or polytypic, wintering or transient species. The majority of us do not distinguish the Sharp-tail subspecies in the field, and thus our selective shooting is held to a minimum. Now, if the total number of specimens is sufficient and if the major habitat types frequented are sampled, we may conclude that our specimens are taken in a somewhat random fashion. Consequently, relative numbers of determined specimens mirror with little distortion the several races' relative numbers in the field. At present the adequacy of our samples of specimens may be questioned and the degree of distortion may be considerable. But even so, this approach is far better than one of impression-gaining or of interpolation based on findings in neighboring states. In a general sense, as well as in this particular case, our words of appraisal of status take on enhanced meaning, if not beauty, when they are grounded upon data of a quantitative sort.—ROBERT A. NORRIS, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley 4, California*.

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