

THE ORIOLE

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



Vol. XVIII

JUNE, 1953

No. 2

THE ORIOLE

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Student } \$2.00; Regular, \$3.00; Sustaining } \$5.00; Life, \$25.00; Patron, \$100.00.
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THE GREATER SANDHILL CRANE IN GEORGIA

By LAWRENCE H. WALKINSHAW

In *The Oriole* (18:10-11, 1953) Frederick V. Hebard commented on the migration of the Greater Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*) across Georgia. I feel confident that Hebard is right. Greene *et al* (*Birds of Georgia*, 1945, p. 36) mentioned this possibility. In *The Sandhill Cranes* (1949, p. 4) I mentioned that the indications were strong that *tabida* from Michigan and Wisconsin wintered in Florida and (p. 121) that Francis Harper has believed for years that this sub-species migrates across Georgia. He mentioned back in March 1916 that Tom Chesser observed a flock of 100 cranes flying across the southeast portion of the Okefenokee Swamp area but where the Florida Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis pratensis*) are resident. A number of more recent records from this same area were also mentioned by Harper.

During late February or early March, sometimes in late March, the Greater Sandhill Crane returns each spring to Michigan and northern Indiana migrating northward into northern Michigan and central Wisconsin in late March or early April. During the fall it leaves Wisconsin and Michigan in October and November. All of the present Georgia records (except from Okefenokee or nearby) as well as those from Tennessee fall during this period except two. These records are as follows:

GEORGIA—SPRING: Charlton County, Chesser Island, March (about 1916) (100), Thomas Chesser (Harper, letter); March 19, 1933 (19), Mattie Chesser; March 20, 1940 (200) (flying high overhead in a northwesterly direction), Ben and Tom Chesser.

Jasper County, Jackson Lake, March 24, 1940 (40), Charles H. Wharton (*Oriole*, 5:18-19, 1940).

Jones County, Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge, Round Oak, March 6, 1952 (60 in one flock flying north), D. R. Ambrosen (*Audubon Field Notes*, 6:191, 1952).

TENNESSEE—SPRING: Chattanooga, June 1, 1935, specimen shot, W. K. Butts (*Migrant*, 7:24, 1936).

Cumberland County, Crab Orchard, March 13, 1939 (13), Paul Adams (*Migrant*, 10:16, 1939).

Anderson County, Oak Ridge, February 25, 1950 (4), Carlson (*Audubon Field Notes*, 4:201, 1950).

TENNESSEE—FALL: Bedford County, Shelbyville, August, 1936, J. M. Edney (specimen shot from flock of 4) (*Journ. Tenn. Acad. Sci.*, 15:401, 1940).

Anderson County, Norris Lake, October 21, 1951 (4), J. C. Howell (*Audubon Field Notes*, 6:17, 1952).

Sevier County, Seymour, October 22-24, 1942 (50 in one flock, one shot), Theodore Blair (see H. P. Ijams, *Migrant*, 13:56, 1942).

GEORGIA — FALL: Jones County, Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge, November 1, 1942 (15), Raymond J. Fleetwood (*Oriole*, 7:34, 1942); October 31, 1949 (15), Ambrosen (*Audubon Field Notes*, 4:9, 1950) (*Oriole*, 15:8, 1950).

Fulton County, northern portion, November 1, 1951 (3, of which 2 were shot but not saved), unknown farmer took them to Roy Wood at Roswell (see Peters, *Oriole*, 17:31, 1952).

Coleraine (either Charlton or Camden Counties), October 27, 1945, November 27, 1947, John W. Burch (see Hebard, *Oriole*, 18:10, 1953).

From these observations along with two observations in the spring at Louisville, Kentucky, March 19, 1933 (13) and April 3-6, 1938 by Burt Monroe (*Auk*, 55:670, 1938) and a number from the central portion of Indiana, rarely in Illinois except through the Chicago area and rarely in Ohio, one realizes by plotting on a map of the United States the records listed above and those of central and northwestern Indiana, where the great concentrations occur each spring and fall (*Indiana Audubon Quarterly*, 1950, 28: Mumford, pp. 82-86; Walkinshaw, pp. 78-82), that an almost straight line can be drawn on the map of the United States from southern Georgia to central Wisconsin. The majority of the above records fall almost directly on or near this line. From recent observations in central Wisconsin the cranes then move in large numbers to the northeast apparently into the northern peninsula of Michigan. Smaller groups of migrating cranes have been observed in southern Michigan, western Ohio and eastern Indiana. During 1943, 350 cranes were counted at Jasper-Pulaski Game Preserve, Indiana; on March 29, 1953, 1214 were counted by Mr. and Mrs. John Bunnell and others. From 1952 census figures we have in southern Michigan less than 175 cranes, while in the northern peninsula we estimate at least 1000. This great increase has resulted in many more observations in recent years. Definitely *Grus canadensis tabida* migrates from Michigan and Wisconsin through Georgia either into the Okefenokee Swamp but more likely farther—into Florida. Yet there are no specimens from Georgia although there are from eastern Tennessee. Banding could probably solve this problem, but thus far we have been unable to capture any cranes for banding.

Through southern Minnesota, through Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas and Louisiana and western Illinois few recent migration records exist. West of this great concentrations occur in Nebraska, South and North Dakota, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Hebard (*Oriole*, 18:11, 1953) was wrong when he stated I had recorded no specimens of *tabida* in any museum from either Louisiana or Texas. I wrote that no specimens as large as the summer cranes in Michigan, Wisconsin, Oregon and California had been found in winter in Texas and Louisiana. However, these winter birds have often proved to be the size of those nesting in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta which are intermediate in size but must still be considered as *Grus canadensis tabida* because the type specimen was taken in Nevada and was not a very large crane either. The small series of Rocky Mountain cranes are definitely smaller than those we have in Michigan or those that did exist in Ohio and now exist in summer in Oregon. Yet they are larger than the summer cranes from central Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, but again we have only a small series from each area.

SUMMARY

Increasing numbers of Sandhill Cranes are observed during migration in recent years in Georgia and eastern Tennessee. These cranes must definitely belong to the northern form *Grus canadensis tabida*. However, no specimens exist from Georgia to verify this. There is a specimen from the region of Knoxville, Tennessee. Apparently the cranes, without banding evidence, migrate from Michigan and Wisconsin to southern Georgia or into Florida. This migration occurs in Georgia during very late October or during November in the fall and during March in the spring.

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Battle Creek, Michigan

THE BLACK VULTURE AS A PREDATOR IN SOUTHERN GEORGIA

BY MILTON HOPKINS, JR.

It is generally believed, and the belief is largely true, that vultures in the South live almost exclusively on dead animals and their remains. However, the Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) has from time to time become a predatory bird to be reckoned with, especially in restricted localities. Whether or not this predatory tendency is sporadic will have to be determined by further observations. With the movement towards disease eradication and improvement of breeds among our livestock in Georgia, stock owners tend more and more to remove dead animals from pastures; this is especially true because rendering companies are offering free removal of dead carcasses from stock-keepers' premises. Possibly this partial removal of the buzzards' food supply has left them no other choice than that of killing living animals inasmuch as the few small animals killed on the highways cannot possibly supply the needs of the buzzard population existing in some localities.

Losses have, in large part, been restricted to swine. Some stock owners have attempted to control buzzard predation by trapping. During a period of investigation of a game management problem in southwestern Georgia in 1950, the writer first became acquainted with buzzard traps. This was in the vicinity of Big Cypress Pond, Early County. A local resident who had used a buzzard trap during the past few years told of having trapped so many buzzards that they were standing on their own dead within the trap. This particular trap consisted of a mesh field wire enclosing approximately 150 square feet of ground space, with a wire top and a 50-gallon barrel with a funneled opening on the inside used as an entrance. This trap was first baited with a dead animal and, in the words of the owner of the trap: "It baits itself after a few get in and perish and I've seen it kneel high with dead buzzards." There is no evidence that the trapping operation is adversely affecting the buzzard population in that area, however, since necessarily the number of buzzards entering a trap would decrease at an increasing rate in any one trapping location. Robert Norris in 1948 and the present writer in 1950 both observed a Black Vulture roost near Big Cypress Pond that contained several hundred individuals.

Vulture trapping, to my knowledge, is not restricted to this single occurrence since on April 15, 1951, several members of a G.O.S. field party and I noted a trap on the Reynolds Brothers Refuge in Dougherty

County, Georgia, that contained between 50 and 60 live Black Vultures. Mr. H. L. Stoddard, Sr. (personal communication) states: "To my personal knowledge buzzard trapping had been conducted in this livestock farm and timber holding at least ten years earlier." Since my interest was first aroused concerning this vulture predation and resultant trapping, I have located one stock owner in Irwin County, Georgia, who has attempted to trap this species, although with poor results. As an experiment on "food perception" on November 5, 1952 at 11:45 A. M. I placed a 125-pound dead hog in this trap. At this time no buzzards were visible. The trap was located in a clearing which was part of a 50-acre permanent pasture. At 1:00 P. M. three Black Vultures were noted circling high over the trapping area. At 3:30 P. M. 35 Black Vultures and eight Turkey Vultures were within sight of the trapping area. The Turkey Vultures were much more wary about approaching the trap than the Black Vultures and would usually alight in some tall tree nearby while some of the latter species landed directly on the trap structure and on the ground nearby. Several of the Black Vultures entered and left the trap without being caught. At 5:00 P. M. no buzzards were in sight.

During different periods of March, April, and May, 1952, I had knowledge of or observed the killing and partial consumption of 18 Duroc pigs on a farm in Irwin County. On several occasions the flock of vultures molesting these pigs were frightened "out of sight" of the area by gunfire only to be found back at work again on the days following. Local residents agreed that Black Vultures were the predators in several cases that they were aware of, although one man told of a "red-headed buzzard" that had plucked the eyes from a new-born Hereford calf before the owner was able to locate it. Apparently local residents clearly differentiate between the two species or types of buzzards present, although some believe that Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) are males and that Black Vultures are females of the same species. In June, 1952, I noted a large gathering of Black Vultures in a pasture in Irwin County and on investigation found that they were gathered in trees above a yearling attempting to have her first calf. The actual method of predation on swine, as observed by myself, was very similar to that described by Lovell (1952) in which he states that the buzzards taking part attacked the tail and rectum and pulled out the intestines of new-born pigs. On several occasions during the spring and early summer here in Irwin County I have observed four and five Black Vultures with outspread wings to surround a small pig and to peck near its eyes and anal region. These vultures were quite bold, for observations were made from a vehicle only 25-30 yards away in an open pasture. These vultures would fly off only when disturbed by my approaching them on foot, but would be back at work shortly.

Further investigation into the vulture predation problem reveals that A. C. Bent (1937) has this to say concerning the subject: "J. D. Figgins (1923) found that vultures in the neighborhood of Bird Island, Louisiana, were very destructive in some of the heron rookeries and stated that 'it is a frequent occurrence to observe a vulture with a struggling young heron dangling from its beak. . . . In regions where cattle raising has replaced the cultivation of rice, the Black Vulture is credited with considerable damage to the herds by tearing the eyes from calves at the time of birth and instances are cited of a like treatment accorded cows while in a weakened condition. I personally saw one of these tear the tail from a

small pig, and was informed that the practice was of too common occurrence to excite comment.' O. E. Baynard (1909) reported that these birds were very destructive to young pigs and lambs in Florida, and he has known them to take young chickens. Young herons are frequently devoured. Audubon (1840) says of his experience with the bird in Florida: 'I observed them many times devouring young cormorants and herons in the nest.'"

"The United States Biological Survey recommends local control where 'through their predatory habits and concentrated numbers, both turkey buzzards and black vultures have become a menace to new-born pigs, calves, lambs, and kinds' (Redington, 1932)."

It is a widespread belief among stock growers in this section that buzzards are carriers of the virus causing hog cholera, although Howell (1928) states: "There is no evidence, however, that the buzzard actually does spread this disease and certain experiments carried on by the Bureau of Animal Industry with pigeons and infected pigs indicate that the virus of hog cholera is probably not disseminated by being carried on the feet or feathers of birds. Furthermore, it has been shown by the State Board of Health of Florida (1915) that 'the virus of hog cholera is digested in the intestinal tract of buzzards and that the droppings of buzzards fed on the flesh of hogs dead from cholera do not produce cholera when mixed in the feed of hogs.'"

A check on Christmas and July 4th bird censuses in Georgia shows that the Black Vulture apparently outnumbers the Turkey Vulture considerably. Robert Norris (1951) is of the opinion that the Turkey Vulture was considerably less numerous than the Black Vulture in southwestern Georgia. Mr. H. L. Stoddard, Sr. (personal communication) states: "The ratio of Turkey Vultures to Black Vultures in the Thomas-Grady County area for the past 29 years appears to be in the neighborhood of 1 to 3 or 4. However, as the Turkey Vulture undoubtedly spends proportionately much more time in the air soaring, on the basis of observations so made it would appear to be nearer 1 to 2. On the basis of birds perched, or feeding on carcasses the ratio would be 1 to 4 or even higher of the latter species."

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 Fitzgerald, Georgia

GENERAL NOTES

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE AT ROME, GEORGIA.—On April 27, 1953, I found a Green-tailed Towhee (*Oberholseria chlorura*) on the property of Darlington School, just south of Rome, Floyd County, Georgia. Two of my students, Wentworth Hamilton and Bo Sullivan, were with me at the time. The bird was with a male and female eastern Towhee. All three birds were in a rubbish heap where waste paper and refuse are carried to be burned, and they came out from under a twisted mass of old fence wire. The Green-tailed Towhee's manner was somewhat striking in that it hopped about in a very jaunty and alert manner. The place is at the edge of a small grove of trees along a sluggish stream, called locally "Silver Creek." Through this grove is a dense undergrowth of thicket made up of bushes overgrown with Japanese honeysuckle and a low growth of cane.

I immediately telephoned Gordon Lee Hight, Jr., who carries a collector's permit, and after some careful debate we decided to collect the bird, since it was apparently a first record of this species for the State of Georgia.

Measurements of the bird, taken before skinning, were: length, 7.1 in.; bill, 0.48 in.; each wing, 3.1 in.; tail, 3.3 in.; tarsus, 1.1 in. The iris of the eyes was dark, reddish-brown. It had quite a good bit of fat stored in its body, and appeared to be in good physical condition. It was a male, both testes well-developed, measuring: left testis, 4.4 mm; right testis, 4.6 mm in length, both rather globular in shape with only slight elongation. Mr. Hight has placed the skin in the U. S. National Museum. **GEORGE A. DORSEY, Darlington School, Rome, Georgia**

NOTES ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THREE UNCOMMON SPECIES OF SPARROWS NEAR ATLANTA.—During the winter of 1952-53 there was a considerable influx of western species of birds into the Southeastern States. Interesting then was the occurrence near Atlanta of the following three species of sparrows whose winter range lies principally to the west of this state.

Leconte's Sparrow: *Passerherbulus caudatus*. On December 21, 1952, the writer, in company with Henry Robert and Jack Carusos, flushed an unidentified sharp-tailed sparrow from the dense cover of an open grassy meadow bordering South River in Fulton County, Georgia. About a week later, on January 1, 1953, the writer returned and succeeded in finding two of these sparrows in the same meadow. One was collected in order that positive identification could be established. It proved to be a fine example of Leconte's Sparrow, a male in adult plumage. The species was again seen in this field on January 3, 1953, but thereafter opportunity was not afforded for additional checks on its presence.

This species has been recorded about Atlanta on but one previous occasion. The dearth of records, however, may possibly be attributed to the elusive nature and habit of the species rather than to actual scarcity.

White-crowned Sparrow: *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. Records of the occurrence of this sparrow in Georgia have been increasing markedly in recent winters. Whether this is due to increased observation or an increase in the number of wintering birds, is, of course, rather conjectural. I am able to report, however, that during the past winter a small flock of at least eight to ten birds spent their time along the fence rows adjoining

Smith's pasture and the South River in DeKalb County near Constitution, Georgia. The flock was first discovered by the writer on January 1, 1953. All birds were in the sub-adult plumage. As late as May 3, 1953, a single bird, this time in the plumage of an adult, was seen by George Sciple and me. To my knowledge this is the first resident flock to be found in the Atlanta region, all previous records having been of single birds.

Harris's Sparrow: *Zonotrichia querula*. While observing the flock of White-crowned Sparrows mentioned above on January 17, 1953, I caught a glimpse of a large bird thought to be Harris's Sparrow. The bird was somewhat wary as were the White-crowns and disappeared into a thicket bordering the South River. Despite a search for several hours by Richard Parks and me, the bird was successful in remaining hidden. The following day I returned and immediately spotted the bird with the flock of White-crowns. This time the specimen was collected in order that its identity could be substantiated. It proved to be a female in sub-adult plumage, moderately fat. The specimen now remains in my personal collection.

This is apparently only the second record of this species from Georgia. J. Fred Denton trapped a bird at Athens on April 23, 1937. Significantly perhaps, the bird which Denton trapped was also in company with a White-crowned Sparrow.—**WILLIAM W. GRIFFIN, 3232 Pine Ridge Road, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia.**

FEEDING METHODS OF THE SHRIKE.—The majority of the peanut crop in southern Georgia is harvested each year during late summer and early fall by plowing up the vines, shaking them, and then stacking them in large stacks about twenty to the acre. The vines on the stacks are then allowed to dry for approximately three weeks or longer depending on weather conditions. Up to five house mice (*Mus musculus*) have been known to take up abode in a single stack (personal observation). During October, 1951, Shrikes (*Lanius ludovicianus*) in the Osierfield, Irwin County area tended to shift their lookout perches from utility lines and fence row trees to peanut stacks in fields where peanuts were being threshed. A single Shrike was noted to kill and impale four house mice during one hour of my observation when stacks were being moved by tractors for threshing, thus exposing the mice. These mice were usually seized with the bird's claws and killed with several swift strikes of the beak. On two occasions the observer was close enough to the bird to see it transfer its prey from talons to beak while in flight. Thus Shrikes are able to hold and carry large prey in their feet even though unable to kill it with feet alone. All four of these mice were impaled on plum tree (*Prunus sp.*) thorns. House mice weigh from 14 to 24 grams, and some of the larger ones present quite a job for a bird of the size of the Shrike in carrying the load.—**MILTON HOPKINS, JR., Fitzgerald, Georgia.**

NEWS AND COMMENTS

SPRING MEETING, 1953.—The twenty-eighth semi-annual meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society was held at Milledgeville, Georgia, on April 25 and 26, 1953, with headquarters in Ennis Hall at the Georgia State College for Women. Total attendance of members and guests was 125. The meeting officially opened with an Executive Committee lunch-

con and meeting on Saturday, but over thirty had arrived by Friday night for fellowship and added time in the field. Saturday afternoon was devoted to field trips in the area.

The group gathered in the G.S.C.W. cafeteria for the banquet Saturday evening. Miss Katherine Weaver, Regional Vice-president for the Milledgeville area, welcomed the G.O.S. to Milledgeville and acknowledged with appreciation the work of those who aided in preparation for the meeting.

Following the dinner a business meeting was held with President Harold S. Peters presiding. The president welcomed visitors and extended to them an invitation to become members of the society. A general report on aims and activities of the Regional Vice-Presidents was given by Mrs. J. C. Oliver, Second Vice-President, and was followed by reports from each of the Regional Vice-Presidents.

Ivan Tomkins reported on the need of an Editorial Committee based on the organization and policies of some of the larger and older ornithological societies with the view of assisting the editor and establishing more definite editorial policies. Mr. Tomkins presented the Executive Committee's recommendation for an amendment to the By-Laws and submitted the following proposed change in writing to the President:

Article VIII, Section 3. The Editorial Committee shall be composed of the editor of *The Oriole* as chairman and three other members. Members other than the chairman shall serve for terms of six years, staggered in order that one shall be appointed every second year by the incoming president. Neither the appointing president nor his successor shall have the right to remove a member appointed to this committee. The duties of this committee shall include the following:

- a. The establishment of long time editorial standards for *The Oriole* and occasional publications of the Georgia Ornithological Society.
- b. The lending of assistance to the editor of *The Oriole* or an author of an occasional publication of the G.O.S.

It was moved and seconded to adopt this amendment to the By-Laws and was carried unanimously.

Dr. Gertrude Manchester read a letter from Herbert Stoddard reporting on the progress of Thomas D. Burleigh's book on Georgia birds. He reported that in February a committee met with Mr. Burleigh and arrived at tentative decisions concerning list and hypothetical list policies and the general layout of the book. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service has released the manuscript for private publication, and it is hoped that publication can proceed during the coming winter.

After the business session the group adjourned to another room for the showing of the Walt Disney film "Nature's Half Acre."

Field trips began at 6:00 A. M. Sunday, were briefly interrupted for breakfast, then continued until noon when the list of birds seen was read on the steps of Ennis Hall. A total count of 118 species for the two days was reported.

ORIOLE REPRINTS. — The following out-of-print numbers of *The Oriole* are now available from the Business Manager:

Vol. 1, No. 1	Vol. 11, No. 3
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