

# THE ORIOLE

A Quarterly Journal of Georgia Ornithology; Official Organ of the  
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No. 3

# THE ORIOLE

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## A WESTERN Tanager AT WARNER ROBINS, GEORGIA

By GLADYS B. BLACK

On December 24, 1955, I glimpsed a greenish bird at a suet feeding station about fifteen feet from my kitchen window in Warner Robins, Houston County, Georgia. It returned to the same suet feeder three more times that day indicating that it was hungry. Each time it ate rapidly and cautiously. Upon first impression, it appeared to have a grosbeak-like bill, but comparison with a nearby Cardinal (*Richmondia cardinalis*) indicated that the bill was smaller. At this time, my husband and I noticed that the bird was dark green above, lighter below, and had two narrow, dull white wing bars.

The next day the bird returned several times to the suet feeder, again exercising caution. We then noted its resemblance in appearance and behavior to the Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) which visited our feeders during the previous summer. From December 25 until late February, 1956, the bird fed almost daily at the same feeder and came several times each day, usually appearing early in the morning or late in the afternoon. It proved to be unsociable, being easily frightened away by the many other species of birds which frequent our several feeders. It ignored several other suet feeders, fruit, scratch feed, most bread crumbs on the ground, and water. We put peanut butter on the suet feeder, and it was eaten readily. On December 28, 1955, and on several other days, the green bird was observed catching insects at a height of 25 feet in the large pines behind our lot. During all these observations in and around the feeder, my husband, Hedvig Cater, and I noted more field marks, especially the yellow undertail coverts, and, after examining several books, we suspected the bird to be a Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) primarily because of the heavy bill, general greenish coloration, and wing bars.

On February 22, 1956, Dr. David W. Johnston loaned me a trap so that the sometimes-elusive bird might be caught and identified with certainty. The trap was set on March 10 after permitting the bird (and other species) to feed in and around it unmolested for several days. Unfortunately the bird escaped from the trap which failed to function properly at this important time, and, with the absence of the bird for several days, we presumed that it would not be seen again. However, to

our extreme delight, it reappeared on March 18, and on March 19 the "automatic" trap was rigged with a long string and weight. This time the bird was caught, examined carefully, and photographed.

Since a tanager of any species in Georgia in winter is rare, the bird was prepared as a study specimen by Dr. Johnston who then sent it to Dr. Alden H. Miller, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California. Our identification as a Western Tanager was confirmed by Dr. Miller. It proved to be an adult female, weighing 38.9 grams, and was from all appearances in excellent physical condition. A few feathers were molting on the throat and chest, and a secondary covert was molting in new. This confirmed our belief that the bird was getting brighter each day that we observed it at the feeder. The specimen (#1123 DWJ) is now in the collections of the Biology Department at Mercer University.

This is the second known occurrence of this species in Georgia. Herbert L. Stoddard took a female on November 11, 1954, on Birdsong Plantation in Grady County. It is of considerable interest to note that both of these tanagers appeared at backyard feeding stations. Furthermore, other accidental avian species from the western United States, such as the Bullock Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*), have been noted first at feeding stations. Thus, backyard bird observers may from time to time add the "spice" of rarities to the "meat and potatoes" of the everyday, common species.

101 George Drive  
Warner Robins, Georgia.

## AVERAGE DATE OF ARRIVAL OF SPRING MIGRANTS AT MACON, GEORGIA

BY DAVID W. JOHNSTON

With the demise of Mrs. Beryl T. Mounts in 1955, middle Georgia lost one of its most assiduous ornithologists, a person who first began keeping records of ornithological observations from the Macon, Georgia, area in 1916. From then until the time of her death she filled many notebooks with records, giving dates and numbers when the various species were seen. In this fashion she compiled thousands of records, many of which were sent to the Fish and Wildlife Service, and have become permanent in their files. Mr. Mounts has kindly turned her notebooks over to me, and the records therein became, in a large measure, the basis for my recent publication, "A Preliminary List of the Birds of Macon, Georgia, and Vicinity" (12 pp., mimeo. 1955). Unfortunately her notebooks and other records dating from the late 1940's were not found—these may turn up later—, but we do have at hand her notebooks containing almost daily observations from 1916 through 1942.

These data, of course, offer many possibilities for interpretation and compilation, aside from the extreme dates of occurrence which appeared in the aforementioned mimeographed list. It occurred to me, for example, that we could determine from her records the first date of occurrence for spring migrants for each year, present the extreme (earliest and latest) first date of arrival over a period of years, and then compute the average or mean first date of arrival for each species. These data have been ascertained for thirty-odd species in the following fashion. For the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, as an example of procedure, from 1916 until 1942 there were first dates listed for 17 years, the earliest being March 15 and the latest April 1, with the other 15 dates scattered between these two extremes. In order to compute the mean first date of arrival, a scale was devised beginning with March 10=1, March 11=2, March 12=3 . . . May 20=72. Each date of occurrence was thereby translated to a numerical value, all of which could be summated, and a mean calculated. For this species, the numerical mean was 15 which was equivalent to March 24—the mean date of arrival for this species. In a similar way the data for the other species were calculated in table 1. Species for which there were less than nine dates available are not included in this study.

It is apparent that such computed data might have only limited validity, this depending in large measure upon the consistent and relatively uniform observations made from year to year. It may have been, for example, that Mrs. Mounts could not get afield one year until April 1 at which time she saw the gnatcatcher for the first time that year. In reality the species might have arrived earlier. Furthermore, we have no way of

Table 1.—First dates of arrival in spring for certain migrants in the Macon, Georgia, area. Each species' name is followed by the number of available records, the extremes, and the mean date of arrival.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	(N=17)	March 15-April 1; mean=March 24.
White-eyed Vireo	(N=19)	March 15-April 6; mean=March 27.
Fish Crow	(N=13)	March 10-April 19; mean=March 29.
Hooded Warbler	(N=19)	March 22-April 14; mean=April 3.
Wood Thrush	(N=21)	March 28-April 22; mean=April 5.
Rough-winged Swallow	(N=14)	March 28-April 27; mean=April 8.
Kingbird	(N=21)	March 30-April 19; mean=April 11.
Orchard Oriole	(N=21)	April 5-May 4; mean=April 11.
Summer Tanager	(N=19)	March 31-April 27; mean=April 11.
Catbird	(N=21)	March 9-April 21; mean=April 12.
Yellow-throated Vireo	(N=17)	April 1-May 4; mean=April 12.
Prairie Warbler	(N=18)	April 2-April 24; mean=April 13.
Chimney Swift	(N=20)	April 4-May 5; mean=April 14.
Ruby-thtd. Hummingbird	(N=19)	March 31-May 5; mean=April 14.
Solitary Sandpiper	(N=14)	March 22-April 29; mean=April 14.
Broad-winged Hawk	(N=11)	March 31-May 17; mean=April 15.
Red-eyed Vireo	(N=17)	April 3-April 29; mean=April 15.
Crested Flycatcher	(N=20)	April 7-April 27; mean=April 16.
Redstart	(N=15)	April 7-April 27; mean=April 17.
Kentucky Warbler	(N=17)	March 30-April 26; mean=April 18.
Yellow-breasted Chat	(N=19)	April 14-April 25; mean=April 20.
Spotted Sandpiper	(N=18)	April 6-May 5; mean=April 21.
Indigo Bunting	(N=18)	April 14-May 8; mean=April 21.
Wood Pewee	(N=19)	April 11-April 27; mean=April 21.
Green Heron	(N=12)	April 6-May 16; mean=April 22.
Yellow Warbler	(N=14)	April 14-May 2; mean=April 23.
Acadian Flycatcher	(N=12)	April 17-May 2; mean=April 24.
Blue Grosbeak	(N=15)	April 15-May 11; mean=April 25.
Prothonotary Warbler	(N= 9)	April 9-May 16; mean=April 26.
Oven-bird	(N= 9)	April 12-May 9; mean=April 28.
Nighthawk	(N=11)	April 17-May 15; mean=May 2.
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	(N=15)	April 19-May 20; mean=May 5.

knowing how long she was afield each day, or the weather conditions on these days of observation. The numerous records, however, extending over a period of years, tend to minimize these limitations and provide us with data not usually available. At least they give a working basis for future investigations, and, on the basis of extant data, give the average day on which a given species might be expected to arrive in the Macon area in spring.

At a later time it may be possible to compute from Mrs. Mounts' records the average date of departure for a given species. Any and all of these interpretations indicate something of the value of keeping complete records, daily and yearly. Indeed, few ornithologists today can boast as complete a record of observations as we have from Mrs. Mounts. Even though an observation might not seem worth recording at the time, later reflections and interpretations may demand even the most "insignificant" record. It is axiomatic that too many records are of more value than too few.

*Department of Biology,  
Mercer University,  
Macon, Georgia,  
October, 1956*

## GENERAL NOTES

**DICKCISSELS NESTING IN MURRAY COUNTY.**—A colony of Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*) was observed from June 26 until August 10, 1955, in a 175-acre field of *Sericea lespedeza* on the John Looper farm in Murray county five miles southeast of Dalton. On July 2, Mrs. Jack Sohn and I located a nest after watching a singing male as it moved from perch to perch, these usually being blackberry briars or ironweed or other growth taller than the waist-high sericea. From the area occupied by the male we saw a female fly carrying a fecal sac. In ten minutes she returned with a small grasshopper in her bill. Seeing us, she did not reveal the location of the nest, but she circled us, hopping about in the sericea. As we prepared to go away and watch from the adjoining hillside, we saw the nest suspended between the sprouts of blackjack oak (*Quercus marilandica*) about 10 inches from the ground. One of the four young birds hopped from the nest as we examined the dried wisps of yellow hop clover from which the outside of the nest was woven. On July 4, all the young had left the nest, although they were probably in the vicinity because the adults were nervous over our presence. On this day Mrs. Sarah Lloyd and I counted nine singing males in the field, all the birds being in or adjacent to the hilly unmowed section and none in the level mowed section of the field. We believe this to be the largest colony reported in Georgia to date.

On July 22 I went to see a nest containing four eggs which farm workers had seen on July 18. When the foreman located the nest for me, we saw that it was empty but undisturbed. A male Dickcissel continued singing from a nearby ironweed perch and allowed me to photograph him at a distance of approximately 10 feet. No more nests were found, although the other males sang almost continuously from apparently established territories upon each of our visits to the field.

Other occupied nests found nearby were that of a Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*) in blackberry canes among a thick growth of sericea and that of a Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*) on the ground in a small tract of sericea mowed regularly for hay.

In August favorite perches of the Dickcissels were wild lettuce stalks which had matured and produced seeds. These seeds were eaten by the Dickcissels and several other species of birds. On my last visit on August 10 only two Dickcissels were singing spasmodically rather than continuously, as upon earlier visits.

Since the owner grows sericea seeds for sale and has 400 acres of it on this farm, it is probable that a fairly stable breeding colony of Dickcissels may be established here. One factor for successful nesting appears to be the maturation of large tracts of sericea rather than their being cut for hay.

In a recent letter to the writer, Dr. George Mayfield states that Alexander Gerhardt in his report of the birds of the Varnell (Georgia) area in 1855-56 did not include the Dickcissel, although J. T. Park found it breeding at Rising Fawn in Dade County in 1885.—MRS. R. E. HAMILTON, 704 Greenwood Drive, Dalton, Georgia. July 5, 1956.

**PAINTED BUNTING ON THE PIEDMONT OF GEORGIA.**—On August 4, 1956, I drove with a friend to her farm near Senoia, Coweta County, Georgia, about thirty miles SSW Atlanta. I walked down a dirt road which was bordered by short weeds and grass, and about 4:00 p. m. flushed a bird which showed brilliant red in flight. When the bird settled on the side of the road, other colors were seen—violet-blue on the head, a scarlet body, and greenish-gold wings. I watched the bird for ten minutes, checking my Peterson's *Field Guide* all the while, and came to the conclusion that this was a male Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*). Evidently this is the first record for this species on the Piedmont of Georgia. HATTIE E. MCKAY, 705 Piedmont Ave., N. E., Apt. 35, Atlanta, Georgia. August 7, 1956.

**BLUE JAY REGURGITATING FOOD FOR THE YOUNG.**—The purpose of this note is to report a clear-cut case of a passerine bird regurgitating food for its young. The Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) that nest in my neighborhood, have long been suspected of doing this, but the proof was lacking until recently. In late May, 1953, the jays were feeding young in the nearby trees, and one day an adult ate some bread on the lawn. It swallowed a considerable quantity, then flew with empty bill directly to an evergreen tree, fed the young there, and returned for more bread. On other occasions, both adults caught insects, swallowed them, and flew directly to the trees, where the begging notes of the young were heard clearly.

Perhaps this behavior has been noticed before, but none of the standard ornithological works at hand mentions it, though there are numerous accounts of the various kinds of food taken. The Northern Blue Jay swallows whole acorns and hazelnuts, evidently to increase its carrying capacity.—IVAN R. TOMKINS, 1231 East 50th., Savannah, Ga., September 8, 1956.

[There is a recent account (*Condor*, 58:386, 1956) of another corvid, the Clark Nutcracker, feeding its young on regurgitated bits of ground squirrel.—Ed.]

**WOOD IBIS SEEN IN THE ATLANTA REGION.**—On June 30, 1956, about 6:30 p.m., three Wood Ibises (*Mycteria americana*) flew over College Park, Georgia, headed eastward in the general direction of Hapeville. They were apparently in immature plumage, being somewhat dull-color-

ed. They came almost directly overhead, so that my brother, W. B. Dorsey, and I were able to observe them well. There are no previous records for this species in the Atlanta region, and only one from the Piedmont Plateau (Greene, *et al.*, *Birds of Georgia*, 1945).—GEORGE A. DORSEY, *Darlington School, Rome, Georgia*. August 28, 1956.

**AN AVOCET IN LONG COUNTY, GEORGIA.**—On October 26, 1954, an Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) was seen briefly on the south bank of the Altamaha River, at the crossing of U. S. Route 301, in Long County, Georgia. A new bridge was under construction, and there had been some dredging of sand for the approaches which might have been visible from the air. This point is sixty-one miles by the river from its mouth in the Altamaha Sound. Apparently there are no other records for this species from the interior of the state.—IVAN R. TOMKINS, 1231 East 50th St., Savannah, Ga., September 8, 1956.

**PARTIAL ALBINO INDIGO BUNTING AT ROME.**—On May 1, 1956, Philip M. Ham showed me a partial albino bird which appeared at his feeding station at Darlington School, Rome, Georgia. At first we thought it might be a Goldfinch, but its behavior did not fit this species and after observing it for quite some time we decided that it was an Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*).

The entire head, neck, throat, and upper back were clear white. The rest of the underparts were white with a faint, almost indistinguishable, mottling of gray, which began on the upper breast, and grew slightly more pronounced on the belly although still faint (mere ghost streakings). Two or three spots along the flanks were pale grayish-blue. The tail was dull brown, and the wings were variegated brown and white, the outer primaries being completely white. The bill was a bright yellow, the eyes dark and the feet and legs pinkish.—GEORGE A. DORSEY, *Darlington School, Rome, Georgia*. August 28, 1956.

**THE SANDHILL CRANE NEAR KINGSLAND.**—On December 20, 1950, I observed two large wading birds of a slaty-gray color about seven miles north of Kingsland on U. S. highway 17. One bird, with a red forehead, was observed at about 40 feet as it was feeding in a wide ditch beside the highway. The second bird, observed at about 150 feet, was feeding in a pond a short distance north of the first observation. The pond was ringed on three sides with buttonbush but was open on the side facing the highway. Subsequently, the birds were observed on eight other days from December 20, 1950, until about January 20, 1951. I identified the birds as Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*), and place these observations on record because of the geographic location and date of occurrence.—S. C. WITTER, P. O. Box 354, Kingsland, Georgia. September 26, 1956.

**THE CATTLE EGRET IN GEORGIA.**—The Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) has recently been expanding many parts of its range (Rice, *Auk*, 73:259-266, 1956.) It has become fairly common in central Florida and more recently established in northern Florida and the Carolinas. It was to be expected then, that the species might appear in at least the warmer coastal, regions of Georgia where there is a cattle industry.

Since June, 1955, I have been at the Marine Biology Laboratory of the University of Georgia on Sapelo Island and have been looking for the Cattle Egret. The island lies about half-way up the Georgia coast and is wooded except for several large pastures in the central portion where several hundred head of cattle graze. It was on the largest of these pastures that the Cattle Egrets were first seen on June 6, 1956. On that day two birds in nuptial plumage were present, and four days later a bird in juvenal plumage appeared.

Since I had been watching for the Cattle Egret all spring, I am certain that the dates of arrival are correct. It would seem, therefore, that the birds did not arrive with the regular heron migration, but either came by themselves or with other straggling herons and/or egrets. Most of the herons on Sapelo begin nesting by the second week in May. There were no Cattle Egrets on Sapelo in 1955, and probably not before 1956. Henry Robert, Dr. E. P. Odum, and I looked for them during the summer and fall of 1955 and found none. The three birds were observed on many occasions by several others besides myself, sometimes with the aid of a 30X telescope.

The birds, from the day they arrived, spent most of every day on the pasture in the center of the island and therefore probably did not nest. In an effort to test this conclusion, several egret rookeries on the island were visited both in early and late summer but no Cattle Egret nest was found.

The Cattle Egrets fed most of the time with Snowy Egrets, walking among the grazing cattle. They were occasionally seen feeding in ditches and low areas filled with water, with or without the Snowy Egrets.

The last time I was able to find the Cattle Egrets was on September 9. All three birds were present then, but none could be found on September 19.—JOHN M. TEAL, *Marine Biology Laboratory, Sapelo Island, Georgia*. September 19, 1956.

Contribution No. 3 from the Marine Biology Laboratory, University of Georgia, Sapelo Island, Georgia. This research was supported by funds from the Georgia Agricultural and Forestry Research Foundation.

**OCCURENCE OF THE WHIP-POOR-WILL IN LINCOLN COUNTY, GEORGIA, IN SUMMER.**—On the nights of June 10 and 11, 1955, I camped in Elijah Clark State Park on the Clark Hill Reservoir near Lincolnton, Georgia. On both nights the songs of two Whip-poor-wills (*Caprimul-*

*gus vociferus*) were clearly distinguished from the four or five Chuck-will's-widows (*C. carolinensis*) which called almost all night. On the second night the Whip-poor-wills seemed to be calling in the same areas where they had been on the first night, thus suggesting that the birds were occupying territories. A search of these areas in the daylight failed to reveal the birds or a nest. Although no evidence of breeding was obtained, the possibility of the Whip-poor-will nesting in this area is not too unlikely since it has recently been found in summer at Athens, Georgia, by Eugene P. Odum (personal communication). The species has also been recorded in summer south to Edgefield, South Carolina (*Birds of South Carolina*, p. 317, 1949). Elijah Clark State Park is only a few miles west of Edgefield.—J. FRED DENTON, 1510 Pendleton Rd., Augusta, Georgia. September, 18, 1956.

**THE ROBIN IN SUMMER IN EAST-CENTRAL GEORGIA.**—The Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is an ideal species for which one can follow fluctuations in populations and spread in breeding range, because of its familiarity in Georgia and definite preference for towns and human habitations during the breeding season. Fluctuations and spread in the state up through 1945 have been summarized by Odum and Burleigh (*Auk*, 63: 388-401, 1946). Since that time, however, only a single report has appeared in the literature: it was found breeding at Thomson, McDuffie County, in the summer of 1949 (Denton, *Oriole*, 15:21, 1950).

During recent summers, especially 1953 and 1954, while making regular trips between Augusta and Milledgeville, with occasional trips to Macon, I have paid special attention to the occurrence and numbers of Robins in towns on this route along the Fall Line, the present southern limit of its regular breeding range in eastern Georgia. It is obvious that in the larger cities of Augusta, Milledgeville and Macon, the numbers of breeding Robins continue to increase yearly. Also, it is obvious that the species is invading some of the smaller towns in this region because in summer birds which were probably breeding were noted in Warrenton, Warren County, and Sparta, Hancock County. In Warrenton an adult was observed on May 14, 1953, a pair of adults on May 28, 1954, and a single adult on June 23, 1954, all feeding on the same lawn in the center of town. A search of all likely areas in the town on June 23 revealed single birds at two other localities, thus indicating that at least three pairs probably nested in Warrenton during the summer of 1954. A similar search of Sparta on July 29, 1953 and June 23, 1954, revealed birds at two separate places, suggesting two breeding pairs there. On various trips in summer I failed to find Robins in the smaller towns of Jewel, Culverton and Devereaux. In these towns the absence of large, well-kept, and frequently watered lawns, which attract Robins in the larger towns, may account for their failure to nest in the smaller towns.

Although the breeding status of the Robin along the Fall Line in the

eastern half of the state is known, we have little knowledge of its status west of Macon. Observers living or working in that area during the summer are urged to keep an eye on the increase and spread of this common species.—J. FRED DENTON, 1510 Pendleton Rd., Augusta, Georgia. September 18, 1956.

**SIGHT RECORD OF A LIMPKIN NEAR ATLANTA.**—On July 13, 1956, near Atlanta, I saw a Limpkin (*Aramus scolopaceus*) fly up from a small creek to an overhanging limb of a tree. I watched it for several minutes to make certain of its identity. The place was a short distance from the Chattahoochee River, north of the bridge crossing the river on U. S. Highway 41. The creek flows into the river about one half mile away.

In recent years the Limpkin has increased in numbers around Lake Okechobee, Florida, and has apparently re-appeared in some of its earlier haunts in that state. Fred Hebard and I observed one on Mill Creek in Western Camden County near the St. Marys River on February 24, 1936, but this is the first time that I have observed the species in the Atlanta area.—LUCIEN HARRIS, JR., 1360 Spring Street, N. W., Atlanta 9, Georgia. September 17, 1956.

[NOTE—this unusual sight record warrants a comment to the effect that this is the first record, sight or specimen, of this species anywhere north of the Okefinokee Swamp in Georgia. Hence, the bird was about 250 miles from its normal range.—Ed.]

## FROM THE FIELD

A Purple Gallinule was seen near Dalton on May 19, 1956, by Mrs. R. E. Hamilton, Mrs. Jack Sohn, and Mrs. Harold Liner. At Avondale Estates, Mrs. T. J. Cook recorded a White-throated Sparrow at her feeding shelf as late as June 11, 1956. On July 13, 1956, a female Spotted Sandpiper was brought to Mercer University by Dean Holmes. It had been shot on a small pond near Sandersville, where a bird of this species had been observed about two weeks earlier. Its ovary showed indications of recent activity. Tom Cater observed a Horned Lark at Warner Robins Air Force Base on May 2, 1956.

## NEWS AND COMMENTS

**1957 DUES.**—Members of the G. O. S. are reminded of a recent amendment to the By-laws of the Society, namely, that "annual dues shall be payable at or before the Fall meeting of the society. The fiscal year of the Society shall begin with the Fall meeting and terminate immediately prior to the next Fall meeting." Dues for 1957, therefore, may be remitted to the treasurer, Mr. Gordon L. Hight, Jr., at or before the coming meeting.

**FALL MEETING, 1956.**—The thirty-fifth semi-annual meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society will be held at Savannah Beach (Tybee Island) on October 19, 20, and 21. Headquarters will be at the Tides Hotel Apartments on Butler Avenue; winter rates are in effect. Of especial interest will be the numerous field trips to observe coastal birds. One of the field trips will be to the Savannah Wildlife Refuge where, it is hoped, a good population of ducks and other water birds should be in by the time of the meeting. Make your plans now to attend all sessions of this 20th anniversary meeting.

**CONGRATULATIONS.**—G. O. S. members will be interested to know that Drs. Eugene P. Odum and H. T. Odum have been given the George Mercer Award for 1956. This award, given by the Ecological Society of America, was for their outstanding paper, "Trophic Structure and Productivity of a Windward Coral Reef on Eniwetok Atoll." Dr. Eugene Odum is a G. O. S. member of long-time standing, and one of the co-authors of "Birds of Georgia." We extend our congratulations to these two outstanding scientists.