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EDITOR

David W. Johnston, Department of Biology, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia

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J. Fred Denton, Robert A. Norris, Ivan R. Tomkins

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RECENT FLUCTUATIONS IN THE NUMBERS OF BIRDS BREEDING IN THE MCKINNEY'S POND HERONRY

by

J. FRED DENTON

The alarming decrease in the numbers of breeding herons, especially the Common Egret and Wood Ibis, in Florida during the last three years prompts me to summarize the data available on the heronry at McKinney's Pond to see what has been happening there. Since the exact location and other pertinent information concerning the heronry has been given by Odum and Humphries (1954), it is not repeated here.

Information, partial or complete, on the number of nests in the heronry are available for seven of the last eleven years (table 1). Neill (1949) on the first reported visit to the heronry on June 18, 1948, found only nests of the Little Blue Heron. It is possible that the Common Egret had finished nesting at this late date. However, when I visited it on May 6, 1950, six adult Egrets were seen but no nests were found, so apparently there have been years when the Egret failed to nest there.

Although my earlier counts at the heronry were rough estimates, the counts for 1957 and 1958, made by Robert A. Norris and myself by wading through the colony, are considered fairly accurate. The data would seem to indicate a definite decrease since 1953 in the number of breeding pairs of both the Common Egret and Little Blue Heron. The area within feeding range of the heronry along with the rest of south Georgia suffered a severe drought from 1954 to the winter of 1957-58. Possibly the decrease in breeding herons is a reflection of this since the numerous sloughs, flatwoods ponds, and ditches in which they feed dried up completely. On the other hand the Anhinga population seems not to have been affected since these birds feed in McKinney's Pond, fed by a large subterranean stream, and in the nearby Ogeechee River

TABLE I
Number of nests in the McKinney's Pond Heronry, 1948-1958

Source of data	Neill, 1949	Denton May 22, 1949	Denton May 6, 1950	Odum, <i>et al.</i> , 1954	Odum, <i>et al.</i> , 1954	May 15, 1953	May 19, 1957	Denton May 11, 1958
Date Heronry was visited	June 18, 1948			May 27, 1951				
Common Egret	?	325	—*	44	239	50		35
Little Blue Heron	45**	175	50	141	90	20		4
Anhinga	?	3	8	2	3	4		5
Green Heron	?	—	—	—	1	1		—

* Six adult birds present but no nests.

**Only species mentioned in report.

which maintained a fair flow throughout the drought. Now that the water table is high again in the area we can hope and possibly expect to see an increase in the number of breeding herons next year.

LITERATURE CITED

- Neill, Wilfred T. 1949. Little Blue Herons breeding in the juvenile plumage. *Oriole*, 14: 17-18.
- Odum, E. P. and Humphries, R. L. 1954. The McKinney's Pond heronry. *Oriole*, 19: 3-4.
- 1510 Pendleton Rd.
Augusta, Georgia.
August 13, 1958

GENERAL NOTES

FIRST RECORD OF THE SOLITARY VIREO NESTING AT ATLANTA.—

Around the middle of June, 1958, I was invited by Mrs. Natalie Redfern to go with her to the home of her daughter, Mrs. Ben T. Wiggins, 2969 Sylvan Ramble Road in the extreme Northeast section of Greater Atlanta, to try to identify a bird she had found nesting there. The nest was situated on the branch of a poplar sapling approximately 15 feet from the ground right over the patio at Mrs. Wiggins' home. The bird could be easily seen without the aid of binoculars. However, I did use mine to get all the markings about the head, wings, and tail. The bird never stirred at all while I was watching it, although adults and children were milling about underneath the nest. A male was singing in a tall pine not far from the nest. I was certain that it was a Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) but wanted it confirmed by some of the experts in the Atlanta Bird Club. Ed Collum, President of the Club, attempted to photograph the bird on the nest but was unsuccessful due to rain-soaked foliage which obscured the nest. A short time later Mrs. Wiggins reported to me that she had left home for a short visit in town and returned to find that the nestlings had been destroyed by predators (perhaps cats). Since the nestlings had been destroyed, Mrs. Wiggins offered the nest to me; it was later given to Mrs. Walter R. Thomas for her collection.

A check of the literature (especially *Georgia Birds* by Burleigh) fails to reveal that this bird has been previously recorded as nesting in or around Atlanta. It has apparently extended its breeding range to the south and west in the Piedmont Section of Georgia, but this is the first

recorded instance of breeding at Atlanta.—MRS. EMMA F. BOYD, 1140 Edgefield Drive, S. W., Atlanta, Georgia. December 4, 1958.

UNUSUAL DUCKS FROM ATLANTA.—On December 6, 1958, I was called to East Lake in Atlanta to observe a strange duck. It was a male American Goldeneye (*Glaucionetta clangula*) in magnificent plumage. Swimming nearby was another bird about the same size which was not familiar. It was a female Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*), a rare winter visitant in Atlanta for which Burleigh gives only one record in Atlanta (24 years ago.) Proceeding along the shore of the lake to observe the grebes and coots which winter there in small groups, I noted a female Gadwall (*Anas strepera*), another rare winter bird here. The white patch on the wing was evident, as were the white belly and yellow feet when the bird up-ended to feed along the shallow shore-line. On the next day, December 7, I studied all three ducks again at leisure. Wallace Dreyfoos also investigated and confirmed all three identifications.—LOUIS C. FINK, 227 Woodlawn Avenue, Decatur, Georgia, December 10, 1958.

THE SAW-WHET OWL AT WATKINSVILLE, GEORGIA.—On November 8, 1958, an adult female Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) was found along U. S. 441 near Watkinsville, Oconee County, Georgia. Burleigh (*Georgia Birds*, 1958) stated that this secretive owl is a "casual winter resident throughout the state" but mentions only "six" birds taken in Georgia.

The female (U. Ga. No. 1356) had numerous follicles in the ovary with average diameters of 0.75 mm. Some fat was deposited on the abdomen and beneath the skin.—FRANCIS M. BUSH AND HERBERT W. KALE, Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. November 13, 1958.

AMERICAN AVOCET AT MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA.—Three American Avocets (*Recurvirostra americana*) were observed by Sam Austin, Ed Collum, Herb Kale, Del Montague, Margaret Roddy, and Drury Simpson at Lake Sinclair, Milledgeville, Baldwin County, Georgia, on October 4, 1958, at the Fall Meeting of the G. O. S. The birds were seen between 5 and 6 p. m. on a mud flat near the airstrip north of Milledgeville. The weather on Friday and Saturday was cloudy with rain and moderate NNW winds of five to six miles per hour. High temperature was 64°F and 0.4 inch of rain was recorded.

The birds were resting in shallow water at the edge of the mudflat. Because of the uncommon occurrence of this species so far inland, a specimen was taken. Inadvertently, a second bird was also killed. One specimen (U. Ga. No. 1355) was deposited in the University of Georgia collection at Athens; the other specimen is in the possession of Richard A. Parks of Atlanta.

Both birds were females and heavily infested with lice. A large cestode (6 cm.) was found in the small intestine of the U. Ga. specimen. Gizzards of both birds were empty except for a slime of green algae and a few pieces of gravel, 1.0 mm. to 2.0 mm in diameter.

Burleigh (*Georgia Birds*, 1958) stated that the Avocet is "a scarce and irregular transient on the coast" and mentions only one record for the interior of the state, a single bird seen at Albany, Georgia on September 5, 1952, by Mrs. T. T. Giffen.—CHARLES E. COLLUM, 1033 Lucile Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia; and HERBERT W. KALE II, Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. November 13, 1958.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD AT ROME.—In the afternoon of August 31, 1958, three individuals of the Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*), one male and two females, were seen on the property of Darlington School, in the southern part of Rome, Georgia (within the recently extended city limits). The birds were perched together in the top of a small dead tree in a hedgerow, between the school athletic fields and a tract of farm land planted with corn. A good number of grackles, red-wings, and Rusty Blackbirds were in the immediate vicinity, and a goodsized flock of Starlings was not far away, but the Yellow-heads were not in company with any of these at the time they were observed. We had only time to be sure of their identification before they flew away; they were not seen again, although we looked for them for some days. My companions in the field in observing these birds were Miss Louise Nunnally and Philip M. Ham, members of the Floyd County Audubon Society. This is probably the only sight record to date for this species from this part of the state.—GEORGE A. DORSEY, Darlington School, Rome, Georgia. October 4, 1958.

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR OF A CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW.—The Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*) is a common summer resident on Isle of Hope, Chatham County, Georgia, but because of its retiring habits, it is heard far more frequently than seen. However, the antics of one bird observed during late summer did not follow the usual pattern.

This Chuck-will's-widow was first seen in late evening of August 26, 1958. At that time it was perched on a dead branch atop a water oak tree in my neighbor's front yard. The bird was not perched lengthwise in the usual manner, but sat upright at the end of the branch as a flycatcher would. I was cutting my lawn with a power mower at the time and the bird was not disturbed by the noise or activity. I watched it as I worked and saw that it apparently was hunting insects from this vantage point. It would dart from the branch on noiseless wings, circle around, and return to the identical spot. At times it would swoop low over the river which was about twenty-five yards away. The bird continued this activity for almost an hour, but as darkness descended it left the branch.

I was surprised to see the same branch occupied the next evening and watched the Chuck-will's-widow go through the same behavior again until darkness halted all observation. With the exception of only three or four days, the Chuck-will's-widow returned shortly before dusk to this perch every evening for more than a month. At no time was it heard to utter its call or seen to perch lengthwise on the branch. A check with a spotlight showed that it did not occupy the branch after dark. The bird was last seen on September 29. —HERMAN W. COOLIDGE, 11 Bluff Drive, Isle of Hope, Savannah, Georgia. October 22, 1958.

SEASONAL NOTES FROM ATLANTA.—Field work during the late summer and fall of 1958 in the Atlanta area resulted in the following records of interest:

Brewster's Warbler: *Vermivora "leucobronchialis"*. This hybrid was noted on August 26 in Piedmont Park and again on August 31 in a small willow swamp in DeKalb County about three miles north of Decatur, single birds in typical plumage being seen in both instances.

Wilson's Warbler: *Wilsonia pusilla*. A single male of this species was part of a small concentration of migrant warblers found in Piedmont Park on September 11. A second male was taken on September 13 in the small swamp mentioned above.

Olive-sided Flycatcher: *Nuttallornis borealis*. This very rare migrant was seen in Piedmont Park on September 18 feeding in typical fashion from the topmost dead branches of tall trees. This bird was observed at length and identified beyond any doubt. Mrs. Lewis Gordon also saw this species in the same area of the park on September 7.

Least Flycatcher: *Empidonax minimus*. A suspicious looking flycatcher seen on September 28 in the DeKalb County area previously

mentioned was taken and proved to be this species. Identification was confirmed by Thomas D. Burleigh.—RICHARD A. PARKS, 2303 Pembroke Place, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia. November 24, 1958.

NOTES ON HABITAT CHOICES OF TRANSIENT MARSH WRENS.—

On October 5, 1958, while David Johnston and I were walking in old fields bordering Lake Sinclair we were fortunate in locating both Short-billed and Long-billed marsh wrens in essentially the same vegetative situations.

In the Piedmont as in the Upper Coastal Plain regions of the state the Short-billed Marsh Wren, especially during the fall migration, is not an uncommon species. However, the small bird must be searched for in old field areas, usually in fields of approximately the two-year-old stage of plant succession, that is, where there is a good scattering of broom-sedge, a little dog fennel, and a few of the annual plants characteristic of these fallow fields. The bird is secretive and will be heard more often than it is seen. Its scolding notes, uttered with or because of slight provocation or "squeaking" by the observer will readily pin-point the bird and then a little vigorous grass-beating will cause it to flush. We were able to bring the Short-billed species to within a distance of six feet without difficulty.

Although we made no intensive search of the area for determining numbers present, it was apparent that the Short-billed species was outnumbered by the Long-billed species. The Long-billed Marsh Wren in the Lake Sinclair area tended to remain where the vegetation was higher from the ground but not necessarily denser than that favored by the Short-bill. I have found this to be true in some respects concerning upper coastal plain Long-billed Marsh Wren habitat where they are more often found near blackberry bushes or some other plants that reach the height of two-year-old blackberry bushes.

While it is definitely not essential for the above mentioned habitats to be near a source of water or marsh, it appears to me that greater numbers of these two species are to be found in situations near low lands. Near Fitzgerald there is a marsh wren habitat where one is very likely to find both species with a little searching. It is a situation where portions of cultivated land and fallow land tie in the drain to wet slash-pine woodland and wiregrass. The Long-billed species is to be found in the drier upper reaches of this area and the Short-billed species is to be found in greater numbers in the wetter and lower extremities of the area.—

MILTON HOPKINS, JR., 202 W. Roanoke Dr., Fitzgerald, Georgia. November 28, 1958.

NOTES FROM THE FITZGERALD REGION.—When a pair of Pied-billed Grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*) continued to remain on a farm pond three miles southwest of Osierfield, Irwin County, Georgia into the first week of May, 1958, I began to search for evidences of breeding. During the winter months as many as fourteen grebes had been noted on the fifteen-acre pond at one time. On May 10, I waded into three-foot-deep water in the upper reaches of the pond and located a completed nest of the species tied to cat-tail vegetation. At this time a banded water snake was coiled in the empty nest. Both members of the pair of grebes were a short distance away and both were calling.

On June 10, I located a second nest of the species situated on a floating log and tied to emergent aquatic vegetation. One of the adult birds was incubating, so I did not approach any nearer. Although grebes were heard calling regularly during the period between June 10 and June 28, I did not see evidence of the successful breeding until the latter date. On this day one adult and four very young birds were noted in the upper reaches of the pond. When approached by boat they dispersed, dived in several different directions, and the young did not remain with the parent. On July 12, I noted in my field catalog that the grebes were seen in open water in the deep end of the pond for the first time since the past winter. Apparently they had secreted themselves somewhat during the breeding period.

Burleigh (*Georgia Birds*, 1958) mentions, along with Mr. Stoddard's observations, several instances of this species breeding in southwest Georgia. The Pied-billed Grebe probably breeds rather commonly in many parts of Georgia when suitable nesting habitat is available. The bird is very secretive and wary during the breeding period but the cackle-like call, emitted by both sexes, and its abrupt ending are very distinctive and can be heard for quite some distance.

On June 16, 1958, I noted a Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) on a large pond three miles southeast of Osierfield. The bird was in breeding plumage and had apparently landed there following a heavy rain. On subsequent daily visits I could not locate the bird again.—MILTON HOPKINS, JR., 202 W. Roanoke Drive, Fitzgerald, Georgia. November 28, 1958.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD BREEDING AT ATLANTA.—The Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) was added to the list of breeding birds

of Georgia in 1945 (see Denton, *Oriole*, 11:24-27, 1946) and since then has been found breeding at Athens, Atlanta, and Dalton. During the spring of 1958, cowbirds appeared regularly in a small swampy, wooded area north of Decatur in DeKalb County. This area is bounded on the west by heavily travelled Clairmont Road, and west of this is a pasture with at least a dozen cows.

Although female cowbirds were seen on several occasions, the males were much more in evidence and usually were found in groups of two or three, perched and frequently displaying in the bare tops of dead trees at the swamp edge. The birds were last seen on May 18, when two males were seen in the morning, and later in the day a female, followed by a male, was found skulking through the trees. The male was attempting courtship but got no apparent response from the female.

Under these circumstances it seemed very likely that nests in this locality were being parasitized, and a search was initiated in an attempt to prove this supposition. Limited time prevented an exhaustive search, but one parasitized nest was found. This was a nest of the Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*) found on June 7. The nest contained one Cowbird egg as well as one of the host. Another of the warbler's eggs was found on the ground below the nest. The female warbler was feeding nearby and shortly after I had completed making photographs came and settled on the nest. On the following day I found the female incubating.

Unfortunately it was impractical for me to return to the site until June 20 at which time the nest was found empty and considerably damaged, having evidently been discovered by a predator.

The failure to find the cowbirds after May 18 does not, I think, necessarily mean that the birds left this general area. It is possible that a subsiding of the mating instinct in the males would result in their no longer using the swamp as a display area, and the more secretive females there could easily pass undetected.—RICHARD A. PARKS, 2303 Pembroke Place, N.E., Atlanta 5, Georgia. September 26, 1958.

FROM THE FIELD

Louis C. Fink reports a male American Widgeon on East Lake in Atlanta on November 2, 1958. This species is unusual in the Atlanta area in the fall. On September 28, 1958, thirteen members of the Athens Bird Club drove to the top of Brasstown Bald where they spent seven hours counting hawks. At one time (3:30 p. m.) 21 Broad-winged Hawks

were seen, and during the total period of observation, 43 were noted. An Olive-sided Flycatcher was noted in Piedmont Park of Atlanta by Mrs. Lewis Gordon on September 7, 1958. (See separate note in this issue by Richard A. Parks.) Ivan Tomkins reports another specimen of the Western Kingbird taken on December 3, 1958, on Tybee Island. Of four records from Chatham County, all were noted within one-half mile of one another. A Blue Goose was seen by Ben Maulsby on a small lake near Cedartown on October 28-29, 1958. He also reports from the Rome area a Least Bittern on five days between July 20 and August 17, 1958.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

INFORMATION DESIRED.—Mr. W. H. Fries (86 Cushing Street, Providence 6, R. I.) is attempting to locate the elephant folio size sets of Audubon's *Birds of America*. The Georgia subscribers were the following Savannah men: William Gaston, James Potter, Alexander Telfair, Thomas Young, John David Mongin, and Daniel Blake. Anyone knowing of any descendants of these subscribers or the Audubon sets could contact Mr. Fries at the above address.

CAMPUS BIRD COUNT.—A Campus Bird Count or census is being planned for many college campuses and sanctuaries throughout the country in the spring of 1959, and an effort is being made to include as many areas as possible. In 1958, the only participating institution in our state was the University of Georgia, but it is hoped that others can and will participate in 1959. Complete information and forms may be obtained from Kenneth Cooper, Chairman Campus Bird Count, Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, N. Y.

MINUTES OF THE FALL MEETING, 1958.—The thirty-ninth semi-annual meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society was held in Milledgeville, Georgia on October 3, 4 and 5 with headquarters in the John Milledge Motel. Registration began at 5:00 p. m. with 67 persons registering. Informal gatherings were held Friday evening.

Saturday morning members and guests began field work at some of the favorite localities despite frequent light showers. After spending the morning in the field, the group assembled at 1:30 p. m. in the Porter Auditorium of G. S. C. W. for an information and business session with President Ben Maulsby presiding.

Bill Griffin described in detail the breeding of the Alder Flycatcher in the South River area of Atlanta. He further described his finding, to-

gether with Phil Kahl, the Swainson's Warbler in typical territory beyond the southwest section of Atlanta. Further comments on findings of the Swainson's Warbler in the Atlanta area were made by George Dorsey, Ed Collum, and Ray Werner.

George Dorsey requested that more careful studies be made concerning the nesting and other phases of the life cycle of birds in Georgia by the members of the society. He pointed out that these studies should apply to the common birds as well as the uncommon birds.

Dick Parks described several of his observations of interest from the Atlanta area: Olive-sided Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, and two reports of the Brewster's Warbler. He also reported finding of a Cowbird egg in the nest of a Hooded Warbler. Ben Maulsby discussed seeing several Fulvous Tree Ducks in Floyd County. Herbert Kale reported on his work at Sapelo Island with the Long-billed Marsh Wren in conjunction with his graduate studies at the University of Georgia. He displayed a collection of marsh wren specimens and nests. Anne Hamilton reported on the nesting of a Green Heron under unusual circumstances in Dalton.

At 2:30 p. m. the business meeting was brought to order. Anne Hamilton called for reports from the regional vice-presidents.

Harold Peters, representing the National Audubon Society, discussed in detail the serious nature of the methods presently employed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture (particularly the "broadcast" method) in the control of the imported fire ant in the Southeast. He proposed that the Georgia Ornithological Society adopt a resolution to be sent to responsible agencies warning of the dangers of the presently used control techniques and indicating the society's opposition to the present plan.

George Dorsey indicated that such a resolution should be well designed and be somewhat conservative. Rufus Godwin thought that the U. S. Department of Agriculture's viewpoint should be heard before a resolution be drawn up for presentation to the group on Sunday morning at which time the resolution was voted on. A motion made to this effect was approved.

Mrs. J. C. Oliver stated that work should be initiated to encourage the protection of hawks and owls in the state of Georgia. Ben Maulsby indicated that as a start lists should be made and officers contacted of all pertinent organizations throughout the state interested in conservation and related fields. No further action was taken at this time.

Ben Maulsby indicated that continuing projects should be carried on by the various groups throughout the state in an effort to supplement

the new book *Georgia Birds*. Ivan Tomkins suggested that abbreviated check lists, perhaps condensed by the area be made in bound form for use by the members. Dr. David Johnston further suggested that a study committee be appointed to make recommendations concerning the problem. A committee consisting of Bill Griffin, Dick Parks, Ed Collum, and Dave Johnston was appointed.

At 7:00 the banquet was held on the G. S. C. W. campus. Dr. Sara Nelson, representing the Milledgeville group, welcomed the G. O. S. to Milledgeville and thanked several organizations for their help in sponsoring the meeting. After the banquet, Dr. David W. Johnston presented an interesting talk on his trip to Washington to study crows. He illustrated the talk with numerous color slides which he had made while on the trip.

On Sunday morning additional field trips were taken. At 11:00 a. m. the list of observed species was tabulated. A total of 100 species was observed during the three-day meeting.

The resolution concerning fire ant control was read and a vote of the membership taken. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 35 to 9. A copy of the resolution will be filed with these minutes. President Maulsby indicated that ideas were being formed to hold the Spring meeting at Jekyll Island.—CHARLES E. COLLUM, *Secretary*.

RECENT LITERATURE

EXTINCT AND VANISHING BIRDS OF THE WORLD.—by James C. Greenway, Jr. Special publication no. 13, American Committee for International Wild Life Protection, New York, N. Y. 1958. 518 pp. \$5.00. (Order from the committee c/o New York Zoological Park, New York 60, N. Y.)

More than 160 species and subspecies are treated in some detail, with each account including, insofar as possible, information relative to range, description, habitat, habits, and possible causes of extinction. Although many of the forms are (or were) not North American (for example, many of the rails, pigeons, and parrots), many are—Passenger Pigeon, Carolina Parakeet, Great Auk, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and Labrador Duck. It is of interest to note that extinctions and diminutions in avian populations have occurred mainly on islands in the Pacific Ocean where, time after time, author Greenway indicates that persecution has been largely at the hands of men and/or rats. Fitting indeed are his recommendations for rigid control of hunting and rat predations in order to save some of the forms from extinction.—D. W. J.