

THE ORIOLE

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



Vol. XXIV

JUNE, 1959

No. 2

THE ORIOLE

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BIRDS OF SAPELO ISLAND AND VICINITY

by

JOHN M. TEAL

(Continued From Volume 24, No. 1)

*Wood Ibis: *Mycteria americana*. Occurs from March through October, but does not breed on Sapelo. Flocks of 100-200 birds were seen roosting around a small fresh-water pond of an isolated hammock in July, 1957, and 1958.

*White Ibis: *Eudocimus alba*. Common from April through October. One thousand nests were observed in 1958 in the heronry at the north end ponds.

*Purple Gallinule: *Porphyryla martinica*. From May through October, it is found on larger fresh-water ponds. It breeds from June through August. Three nests with six or seven eggs were found in 1958 along with ten dummy nests which never held eggs.

*Wilson's Plover: *Charadrius wilsonia*. Nests on beach dunes, and occurs from March through September.

*(Eastern) Willet: *Catoptrophorus s. semipalmatus*. Common from March through July. Nests in salt marshes and on beach dunes.

Black-necked Stilt: *Himantopus mexicanus*. One was seen in April and September, 1958, on beach ponds.

Laughing Gull: *Larus atricilla*. Common from January through November.

*Gull-billed Tern: *Gelochelidon nilotica*. Found from May through September. Two or three pairs nest on Little Egg Island and perhaps one pair on Blackbeard. One or two birds are occasionally seen feeding on marsh grasshoppers at high tides near the Institute. Ten were seen in the dune area on August 11, 1958.

*Least Tern: *Sterna albifrons*. Common from April through August and September. Nests on beach dunes.

Sandwich Tern: *Thalasseus sandvicensis*. Occurs from July

through October. One to ten individuals are often seen during this period among Royal Tern flocks.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: *Coccyzus americanus*. Uncommon from April to July, in oak woods. Probably it breeds, but I have no direct proof.

*Chuck-will's-widow: *Caprimulgus carolinensis*. Common from April through August.

*Nighthawk: *Chordeiles minor*. Occurs from April through September. Nests in the dunes.

*Chimney Swift: *Chaetura pelagica*. Common from April through September.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: *Archilochus colubris*. Uncommon from April through August.

*Eastern Kingbird: *Tyrannus tyrannus*. Common around pastures from April through October.

*Great Crested Flycatcher: *Myiarchus crinitus*. Occurs from April through August, in woodlands.

Acadian Flycatcher: *Empidonax virens*. Not common. Recorded from May to August. No nesting record.

*Wood Pewee: *Contopus virens*. Common in oak woods from April through September.

*Rough-winged Swallow: *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*. Occurs from March through October. Nests in sawdust pile left from lumbering and in river banks.

*Purple Martin: *Progne subis*. Uncommon from March through October, but nesting gourds put up by Herbert Kale attracted a male and nine females. Four nests were successful until the heat killed the young in June, 1958.

*Blue-grav Gnatcatcher: *Poliophtila caerulea*. Common from March through August.

*Yellow-throated Vireo: *Vireo flavifrons*. Occurs in open pine woods from March through September.

*Red-eyed Vireo: *Vireo olivaceus*. Found from March through August, in oak woods.

*Parula Warbler: *Parula americana*. Found from March through August.

*Yellow-throated Warbler: *Dendroica dominica*. Occurs from February through August. This and the Parula Warbler are both abundant in oak woods.

Prairie Warbler: *Dendroica discolor*. No nesting record, but occurs from March through October.

*Yellow-breasted Chat: *Icteria virens*. Found from March through August.

*Orchard Oriole: *Icterus spurius*. Nests near dwellings, and occurs from April through August.

*Summer Tanager: *Piranga rubra*. Found from April through September.

*Painted Bunting: *Passerina ciris*. This is the most conspicuous finch in summer, being found from April through September. The majority arrive around the first of May. It is interesting to note that whereas most species that nest on Sapelo arrive earlier in the spring than those which nest in the north, the Painted Bunting is one of the last passerines to arrive in abundance. Its arrival signals the onset of summer weather.

E. Rare visitors

White Pelican: *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*. One was seen early in June, 1958, in company with a few Brown Pelicans.

Glossy Ibis: *Plegadis falcinellus*. Two birds were seen feeding on temporary ponds on the cattle pastures from February 28 to March 4, 1959.

Mountain Plover: *Eupoda montana*. On January 1, 1956, among some Black-bellied Plovers on the beach, a slightly smaller plover was noticed which was very uniformly colored on the back and lacked breast rings. It was watched for some time and finally flushed when the white linings and axillars could be easily seen. The bird was seen on two subsequent days under all light conditions by myself and Jurgen Jacobs, a student from Germany. Another bird was seen under similar conditions on January 23, 1957, in a flock of Semipalmated and Piping plovers.

Western Kingbird: *Tyrannus verticalis*. One was seen by Herbert Kale in an old field on September 5, 1957 (Kale, 1957), and one by myself feeding over temporary ponds on the cattle pasture, March 3-7, 1959.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: *Muscivora forficata*. One was seen on the beach dunes in June, 1955.

Cliff Swallow: *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*. One was seen with migrating swallows in August, 1955.

There are sixty species permanently resident in the region, but one, the Brown Pelican, does not breed here. There are eighty-three winter residents, and an additional forty-four that have been recorded during migration. Thirty-three species are residents during summer only. Twenty-four of these species are known to nest. This makes a total of 219

species occurring which, with the six rare visitors, give a total of 225 of which 80 species are definitely known to breed.

There are a number of interesting gaps in occurrence along this coast, especially those for nesting. The three terns (Common, Forster's, and Roseate) are missing from all breeding records for this region although they all occur both to the North and South. This pattern is unexplained as far as I know and any invasion of the region by breeding terns of these species would be of great interest. Other sea birds breed along the Atlantic coast north to South Carolina but have not been found in this study area. Among these may be mentioned the Brown Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Laughing Gull, and Sandwich Tern. I think it likely that the large numbers of cattle on Sapelo beach are a factor in preventing nesting of some, especially the ground nesting types, and in keeping the numbers of others down. It would be interesting to see what changes in breeding bird species and numbers would take place if a part of the beach and associated dunes and marshes were fenced off.

Wood Ibis and Yellow-crowned Night Herons have not nested although they might possibly do so, especially the latter, and will be watched for in the future. The Glossy Ibis has not nested although it does to the north of this region. Reasons why these species do not breed are not at all clear; there are plenty of suitable nesting sites in contrast to the situation with the beach-nesting birds.

Birds characteristic of hardwood swamps may be expected to increase as the cypress and other swamp trees get larger. There are no old swamps on Sapelo as they were cleared for rice culture but areas containing cypress swamps before 1800 are now again growing up with swamp trees.

An interesting situation is developing with the invasion of the Cattle Egret (Teal, 1956). Perhaps the increase in this species will reduce the population of Snowy Egrets which now feed in the cattle pastures in large numbers.

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Marine Institute, University of Georgia
Sapelo Island, Georgia, September 8, 1958

"COLLECT THE BIRD"*

by

L. L. SNYDER

Truth is a state established by fact or reality without question of mistake. This is the goal of science. To approach this state we must surely hold a respect for our objective, recognize the weaknesses of our methods, and attempt to improve them. In the relatively simple matter of recording the dispersal of birds there is reason for concern as was so ably pointed out by the late Dr. Josselyn Van Tyne (*Wilson Bull.*, 68: 63-67, 1956).

The great mass of data that is now pouring in to our international and local journals gives us a better picture of current ornithological events than ever before. For the vast majority of common birds the sight record is adequate and acceptable. Such error as might creep in is ironed out by the weight of mass data and an approximation of truth results. It is a different matter when we are dealing with the unusual. It has become customary with some editors to print the name of a regional rarity in bold type. This is a splendid idea, for, whether it was intended or not, this is a warning. By and large, a sight record of the unusual has low face value in print unless it has been checked and rechecked and finally fully and clearly documented. Even then all we have accomplished is to present to the best of our ability all circumstantial evidence before the ultimate court, namely ornithological posterity. We should be no less careful than the law. Unfortunately, it is seldom feasible, because of time and costs, to document completely such reports in print.

Error in report is scarcely a matter of veracity or lack of skill. There is a multitude of inescapable pitfalls in field identification. Even more important, there is an almost inevitable tendency to rationalize from an imperfect premise imposed by time and circumstance. If there is present an element of over-zealousness, or the sportive or competitive, or some lack of respect for scientific caution, what may result?

Deliberation and veneration may not characterize our whole way of life, but we cannot advance the science of birds with haste and without respect for the scientific method. "Add water and stir" may substitute for cookery these days but "John Doe saw a so-and-so on such-and-such a date" does not make an authentic record new for a region. "Collect the bird", says Ludlow Griscom, according to Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher in *Wild America*, (p. 106), and the authors add, "Scientific orni-

* Adapted from "Collecting Birds and Conservation", *The Ontario Field Biologist*, 12: 16-18. 1958.

thological tradition demands that the first record of a new species for a region be substantiated by a specimen." The writer would add that in his opinion this procedure should not be limited to the first record. Ornithological knowledge and judgement should be applied in every case.

There are some people who object to the collecting of birds. They are inclined to believe that this procedure is unnecessary and inconsistent with the urgency of conservation. I wish to state that it *is* necessary, and it has a negligible effect on bird populations. Frederick C. Lincoln (*Auk*, 48: 540. 1931) presents a list of the known causes of death among banded birds, giving the agencies in the order of frequency. Next to the bottom, immediately before miscellaneous causes which includes being struck down by golf balls, we find scientific collectors. He shows that this cause of death amounts to .000015 of 1 per cent of all known causes, and we can be sure that all such cases were reported.

Among the factors which enter into objection to collecting birds is human emotion. It is my belief that the capacity for emotion is one of the highest of human attributes, but I also believe that the capacity to control one's emotions is higher. Let me illustrate. I have on my desk a recent clipping explaining a new industry in the northern United States. This firm supplies beautiful caskets for the burial of pets and wild birds picked up dead. One item at moderate cost is made of plastic. Another, showing more consideration to the deceased, is a ceramic product complete with rose-bud on top. The account reveals that these caskets are becoming very popular, selling like hot-cakes, and that more and more "ornithologists" are among the customers. I reach the heights of my emotional control by saying that I doubt the last clause in the statement. Though the above may seem irrelevant to my thesis, it is inserted to demonstrate an attitude with which ornithologists must cope. And, believe it or not, as I was writing these sentences, a letter was placed on my desk from a young scientist who sacrifices his time at a Wisconsin nature camp in summer disseminating knowledge and furthering understanding of this world in which we live. I quote: "While at the Camp I continue my own lines of research and this requires that I also continue to collect. Under present conditions all of this must be done under-cover so that we will not offend the campers." Is science being hamstrung by emotions in the United States while Russia forges ahead?

The foregoing is intended to reveal certain difficulties. Collecting specimens is a means of reducing inaccuracies. Since it is apparent that many students of birds have had no opportunity to reach an understanding of this method of establishing fact, I have tabulated below some general statements intended to be helpful.

1 Collecting specimens is simply a matter of gathering facts to

further direct observation. It will never be desirable to cease gathering facts and make direct observation as was done during the Dark Ages.

- 2 Specimens for study and comparison are the special tools of the museum sciences. Although the museum researcher is interested in living organisms, without specimens his particular basis for study (identification, classification, zoogeography, evolution) would not exist, in fact neither would museums.
- 3 Nature is dynamic, so that fact-gathering is a continuing process, never completed. Furthermore, all the museums of the world put together would not be a complete collection.
- 4 Specimens collected, preserved, labelled, and carefully housed in a research collection are perpetually useful. A research collection is not unlike a library of books or a bureau of standards. Specimens are not expendable in the ordinary sense and can be referred to during the development of new ideas or re-examined for verification or rejection of established concepts.
- 5 Collecting birds for research is precisely the same business as collecting butterflies, bullfrogs, or bears, except that it may elicit a different emotional response from some. Ironically, many scientific collectors of birds have been responsible for sharpening the public's emotional regard for birds.
- 6 In the history of bird conservation in the United States many of the most earnest and proponents were, or are, scientific collectors. To mention but a few, we have Chapman, Griscom, and Gabrielson. Undoubtedly birds, as well as the study of them, profited from their collecting.
- 7 Without the background of knowledge based on collected specimens, no adequate bird protection law could be framed, and no authoritative bird book could be written.
- 8 Without specimens there could not have been an Audubon as we know him, and ornithological illustrators of our times such as Fuertes, Sutton, and Eckelberry could not have been ornithological illustrators.
- 9 In addition to the needs of research and illustration, specimens remain virtually indispensable in teaching, either with a cultural approach or in the training of scientists.

It is presumed that there are people who would endorse the foregoing but would question the value of collecting regional rarities which excite so much popular interest. This attitude is understandable if we acknowledge that the interest of most bird observers is more pronouncedly stimulated by the unusual. It is also evident that this interest has a value, but

there is no way of measuring and weighing against the value of a collected specimen. What are the values of a collected rarity, those extra-limital erratic birds?

- (a) An erratic bird collected, labelled, and preserved proves beyond all doubt, both to us and to posterity, that a representative of a given species did occur extra-limital at a certain time. No other evidence is as absolute, and the specimen can be referred to again and again. This is the simple demand of science, especially when dealing with the unusual.
- (b) A collected specimen can be weighed and measured; its sex determined by dissection; its age class established; its normalities or abnormalities observed, the latter including starvation, injury, disease, parasites, hybridity, and other matters. Such biological examination may even indicate whence it came.
- (c) A specimen taken extra-limital often marks the occasion when some biological event is taking place far away in the heart of the range of the species involved. The specimen is simply an undeniable basis for correlation, now or at some time in the future.
- (d) A regional rarity is not always a waif or stray. It may prove to be a pioneer of range change, and thus a collected specimen becomes historically important. Certainly the collecting of a pioneer will not thwart population expansion if it is underway, any more than Indian massacres stopped the settlement of this continent.
- (e) It is well known that many waifs and strays do not survive displacement. A specimen in a research collection will be useful for an estimated thousand years or more. Its remains on a beach or field make small contribution to the scavenger or soil.

It may also be presumed that there are people who might concede all the foregoing but would still feel that there are no established ethical practices among collectors, or there might be collectors who have not considered the ethic side of their procedure. Here is my interpretation of the collectors' Credo: I recognize—

That, in collecting specimens of birds under authorized permit to further science and learning, the collector must accept both technical and ethical responsibilities;

That a collector is obligated to prepare specimens properly and to document fully labels associated with them;

That the preparation of a significant series is often necessary, but the taking of large numbers is unwarranted if only a small selection is to be preserved;

That a private collector should regard his collection as a public trust,

guard it against destruction, and arrange for its eventual disposition where its usefulness and perpetual care are probable;

That a collector should be discreet at all times in pursuing his work to avoid offending persons unfamiliar with his purpose.

Curator, Department of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum, Ontario, Canada, December 23, 1958.

GENERAL NOTES

BARN SWALLOWS NESTING AGAIN IN NORTH GEORGIA.—On July 17, 1958, I found a Barn Swallow's (*Hirundo rustica*) nest with four fledglings almost ready to leave. This nest was in a chicken house of the farm of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Tritt, Suches, Georgia (on highway 60, six miles north of Woody's Gap, Union County). Two days after the nest was found, the young birds left. Because they returned to roost on and around the nest for three weeks, I was able to make several pictures. This is the first time a nest of these birds has been found in that area, but Mrs. Tritt said that she had seen the birds going in the same house in the summer of 1957. In the same chicken house a pair of these swallows was constructing another nest on May 16-17, 1959. At this time the straw-and-mud nest was nearly complete.

The first record of the Barn Swallow nesting in Georgia was made by Stevenson (*Oriole*, 22: 26, 1957) the nest being found near the Tennessee-Georgia line on Lookout Mountain.—GLENN W. BELL, 115 Willowood Circle, S.E., Atlanta, Georgia, February 9, 1959.

POMARINE JAEGER NEAR SAPELO ISLAND—On January 30, 1959, while traveling on the plantation boat *Tarpon* in Doboy Sound towards Sapelo Island, Georgia, I saw two large birds fly up from the water about 200 feet away. Observation through binoculars revealed considerable white in the primaries, an indistinct cap, and dusky breast markings. Although the characteristic blunt central tail feathers were not seen, the large size of these birds (as large as Herring Gulls flying in the vicinity) convinced me that these were Pomarine Jaegers (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) probably in the intermediate phase. There is one previous sight record of this species from Georgia, two birds being noted by Teal in Doboy Sound on March 9, 1958.—HERBERT W. KALE II, Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, February 23, 1959.

WOOD IBIS IN NORTH GEORGIA—In June, 1939, two campers brought me a wounded Wood Ibis (*Mycteria americana*) at Camp Rutledge, Morgan County, Georgia. We kept the bird for a week, but could not get it to eat. It died of starvation. Clear photographs were taken.

On September 7, 1958, The *Atlanta-Journal-Constitution* carried a picture of "Queer Beasts" submitted by my sister-in-law, Mrs. C. C. Tritt. The picture was of five "egrets" which had been killed after a storm in 1914 in Gaddistown Valley near Suches, Ga. Several arm-chair observers further complicated the picture by calling these birds cranes, but after comparing them with my picture taken on July 1, 1939, it is clear that these too were Wood Ibis. Relatively small size (compared with cranes), heavy, slightly decurved bill, and black secondaries are all clearly characteristics of the Wood Ibis.—GLENN W. BELL, 115 Willowood Circle, Atlanta, Georgia, February 9, 1959.

MOCKINGBIRD INVADES NORTH GEORGIA—There is abundant evidence that the Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) is invading the mountains of north Georgia. I began recording birds seen in Union County about 1930, but no Mockingbird was on any of my records until the summer of 1945. The first bird was seen in the yard of Doc Jones, seven miles west of Blairsville. In June, 1946, a nest was found in the same yard. The birds have been nesting around Mr. Jones' home since 1945. Last summer I found two nests in that area and heard birds singing near two other homes in that neighborhood.

On July 7, 1956, while fishing at Woody's Lake, I heard a Mockingbird singing lustily for the first record of this fine singer there. About the same date in 1957, at the same place, I heard birds singing, and found three young birds which had just left the nest. None of the people there had ever seen these birds before these dates. One Mockingbird has been seen on the farm of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Tritt, six miles north of Woody's Gap on highway 60, for the past two years. It sang for several weeks during the summer of 1958, but there was no sign of another bird.—GLENN W. BELL, 115 Willowood Circle, S.E., Atlanta, Georgia, February 9, 1959.

LAPLAND LONGSPURS AT WARNER ROBINS—Previous records for the Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*) in Georgia include one specimen taken by Tomkins at Savannah in 1935 and several observations by Denton at Augusta in 1953, 1954, 1957, and 1958 (Burleigh, *Georgia Birds*, pp. 694-695, 1958). On December 24, 1958, one mile northwest of Warner Robins, Houston County, Dr. Gustav Swanson called the attention of Tom Cater to longspurs feeding with horned larks in a field which was bare except for some sprouting grain. In the same large field on December 27, the writers, accompanied by Mrs. M. T. Grubbs, observed at least five longspurs with a loose flock of about 200 horned larks and a few each of pipits, Savannah, and house sparrows. In spite of light rain, wind, cold, and the constantly shifting flock of birds, one of us (Johnston) succeeded in obtaining a fine male longspur but only after

carefully selecting it through a 20 X telescope. Quoting from his field notes, "the call notes of these . . . species were easily distinguished with a little practice . . . Pipits gave "sic-sic" notes, the notes of the horned larks were plaintive but musical "whews," those of the longspurs, a non-musical "dit-dit" or "dit-dit-dit." Subsequent visits to this and neighboring fields failed to produce any more longspurs. Although this represents the first record of longspurs in this part of the state, it is likely that the species has simply been overlooked in the past due to the observers' unfamiliarity with it.—MR. AND MRS. TOM J. CATER JR., 315 Davis Drive N., Warner Robins, Georgia, and DAVID W. JOHNSTON, Department of Biology, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, April 9, 1959.

A GEORGIA SPECIMEN OF THE WHITE-WINGED SCOTER—On May 7, 1959, a White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta deglandi*) was found resting on the sand at the north end of Tybee Island, near Savannah, with a miscellaneous flock of gulls, terns, and skimmers. After considerable waiting, stalking, and wading, the bird was taken.

The only references to the species in Georgia seem to be the two sight records of Denton, *et al.*, in the vicinity of Augusta (*Oriole*, 19: 32-33, and 23:37), so this is the first Georgia specimen. The 5th Edition A.O.U. Check-list gives the southern limit of the range as South Carolina, although there are some old records from Florida, plus some recent sight records by such observers as Weston, Stoddard, and Mason.

The species may be more regular offshore than is generally realized. This bird, an immature male, had a crippled foot, which is probably the reason it came ashore.—IVAN R. TOMKINS, 1231 East 50th St., Savannah, Ga. May 8, 1959.

THE MCKINNEY'S POND HERONRY IN 1959.—The following data are given to supplement observations made in previous years at the heronry near McKinney's Pond in Emanuel County. Denton (*Oriole*, 23: 41-43, 1958) recently summarized the fluctuations in numbers at this colony from 1948 until 1958. On May 23, 1959, the writer accompanied by Bill Forney and Oliver Snow visited the heronry between 7 and 10:30 a.m. By wading through the pond we attempted to count as accurately as possible the nests, breeding adults, and nestlings, but in the confusion of milling adults and nestlings, we feel that our counts are at best minimum figures.

Common Egrets were the most abundant birds. Most of the seventy nests contained two or three young, some about ready to leave the nest. Nests were from three to thirty feet high, occasionally as many as six being located in one tree. Scattered among these egret nests were at least three Anhinga nests, these evidently containing eggs. Undoubtedly we

missed some of their nests, for overhead we counted as many as sixteen Anhingas soaring at one time. There were about twenty-five adult Little Blue Herons in the trees—we saw no immatures—, but these were not beside nests. In one part of the colony we found twenty-one small, low nests each containing four or five fresh eggs. Measurement of these eggs indicated that they belonged to the little blues. We also found three nests (one with three young) of the Green Heron. Finally, we glimpsed three Snowy Egrets and a single adult White Ibis in the trees, but we did not definitely locate nests of these species. If they were nesting here, it would represent the northernmost breeding site for these species in Georgia.—DAVID W. JOHNSTON, *Department of Biology, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia. June 1, 1959.*

RECENT LITERATURE

BIRDS OF MARYLAND AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.—by Robert E. Stewart and Chandler S. Robbins. N. A. Fauna No. 62 (U. S. Government Printing Office, \$1.75) 401 pp. 1958.

Unpretentious in format and style and virtually devoid of illustrations, this most recent state publication is literally packed with concise, accurate and comprehensive data on birds. The historical sketch extends back to about 1800, including information on publications and ornithologists of the area. Of special value is the section covering birds of the various ecological formations (pine-oak, chestnut, and mixed mesophytic forests).

The species' accounts cover 333 forms and 19 hypothetical ones. For each species concise, clear paragraphs are devoted to relative abundance at all seasons, habitats, migration dates, maximum counts, nesting season, and banding records. Maps of breeding ranges are given for many species. Other important inclusions in this book include breeding population densities, egg and nesting dates, and an extensive bibliography. Perhaps it will be refreshing news to some that this unique publication is completely devoid of subspecies.

The authors are to be commended for their welcome comprehensive treatise on birds of this important area. D.W.J.

FROM THE FIELD

Baltimore Orioles were recorded by Ivan Tomkins at Savannah on April 6 and 20, May 1 and 2, 1959. He observed a Cattle Egret at Harris Neck, Liberty County on April 1, 1959. L. A. Wells reported a mated pair of Mississippi Kites near Columbus on May 12, 1959. In the Macon area, a singing Canada Warbler was noted on May 14, 1959 by David W. Johnston, and a pair of Sparrow Hawks nested (April-May) in the steeple of the Administration Building on the Mercer University campus.