

THE ORIOLE

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CONTENTS

THE BREEDING DISTRIBUTION OF THE LEAST FLYCATCHER AND SOLITARY VIREO IN GEORGIA, By J. FRED DENTON	1
GENERAL NOTES	7
FROM THE FIELD	9
NEWS AND COMMENTS	10
RECENT LITERATURE	11

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THE BREEDING DISTRIBUTION OF THE LEAST FLYCATCHER AND SOLITARY VIREO IN GEORGIA

By J. FRED DENTON

Several species of birds have made striking extensions of their breeding ranges in Georgia during the past twenty years. Notable among them are the Least Flycatcher and Solitary Vireo. The present paper summarizes the published information on the breeding distribution of these two species and presents new data obtained by the author during recent years.

Least Flycatcher: *Empidonax minimus*.

Until 1941 the Least Flycatcher was known in Georgia only as a rare spring and fall transient, only two specimens (definite records) having been collected in the state up to that time. It was most surprising when Glenn W. Bell (1941) reported the finding of two active nests of the Least Flycatcher at Camp Cherokee for Boys, located southwest of Clayton in Rabun County, during June and July, 1941. It was his impression that this flycatcher was a not uncommon resident in the area as other birds were heard calling near Lake Rabun and near Clayton, both localities also in Rabun County. It was unfortunate that in publishing these observations photographs of the Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) were inadvertently included in the paper. Because of this mishap Bell's report was held in some doubt until the breeding of this flycatcher in Rabun County was confirmed on June 9, 1946 by Odum, Burleigh and Denton (Odum, 1947). On this date these observers found birds holding territory and probably nesting along Highway 23 at Wade's Tourist Camp three miles south of Lakemont, at Lakemont and at two localities within the city limits of Clayton. At Clayton a nest containing four nestlings was found and collected. The next spring the Georgia Ornithological Society met at Camp Ray on Lake Burton in Rabun County on May 10-11. During this period several Least Flycatchers, probably on their breeding territories, were recorded between Lake Burton and Clay-

ton, and along Highway 23 between Clayton and Dillard (Johnston, 1947). The breeding locality at Camp Cherokee and the extremes of the localities along Highway 23 are shown by solid triangles on the distribution map (fig. 1).

For the next ten years Rabun County remained the only known area in Georgia where the Least Flycatcher nested. Then on June 18, 1957, the writer discovered this species breeding in the vicinity of Suches in the southwestern corner of Union County, thus extending considerably westward its breeding range in the state (see map). In this locality three pairs of Least Flycatchers were found; the first in a church yard 1.1 miles east of Suches on Highway 180, the second behind a store and in front of the abandoned highway camp in Suches, the third in a small woodlot beside a vegetable garden about 100 yards south of the second pair. No nest was found but the pair at the church was feeding three, possibly four, young just out of the nest when discovered. The male of this pair was collected and its identity was confirmed by Dr. John W. Aldrich.

In attempting to understand the breeding distribution of the Least Flycatcher in Georgia several factors must be considered: habitat preference, altitude, proximity to former range and others less obvious. In its breeding localities in both Rabun and Union Counties this flycatcher shows a decided preference for small park-like groves of relatively young second-growth pines, either short-leaf (*Pinus echinata*) or Virginia pine (*Pinus virginiana*), and in one instance white pine (*Pinus strobus*), in the vicinity of habitations or along highways. The altitude of these sites, 1700 to 1900 ft. in Rabun County and 2500 at Suches, seem of little significance and merely indicate the elevation of the floor of the valleys in the areas. Possibly of greatest importance is the creation of suitable breeding habitat as a result of opening up of the forests and settlement of the areas by man.

Suches is located almost due south of Hayesville, N. C. (see map), an area in which the Least Flycatcher has been known to breed fairly commonly since 1939 (Wetmore, 1941) and from which it probably spread southward into Georgia. Assuming that this was true there is a likely possibility that this flycatcher might be found breeding in suitable habitat anywhere in the valleys north of the Blue Ridge. Although at the breeding site just north of Tullulah Falls the bird is right at the edge of the mountains there is no reason at present to suspect its breeding south of the Blue Ridge in that or any other areas. The report in *Birds of Georgia* (Greene *et al.*, 1945) of its breeding in the Nacoochee Valley is

probably erroneous and should be disregarded until further evidence is available.

Blue-headed Solitary Vireo: *Vireo solitarius*

The Solitary or Blue-headed Vireo is a fairly common breeding bird throughout the Highland Region of Georgia and adjacent South Carolina. Known breeding localities in the Highland Region are listed in Table 1 and are shown on the range map (fig. 1) as solid circles within the fine wavy line denoting the 1500 foot contour. At two localities, near Dahlonega and at Demorest, it has been recorded breeding out on the edge of the Piedmont Region at elevations of about 1400 feet. These are apparently direct extensions of its range from the nearby mountains. Most surprising has been the finding in recent years of this species breeding at several localities at the very lower edge of the Piedmont Region (see Table 1 and map). The first record was a nest found by Fleetwood on June 6, 1946, at the headquarters on the Piedmont Wildlife Refuge near Round Oak. Altogether Fleetwood found the Solitary Vireo apparently breeding at eleven places on the refuge and adjoining areas in Jones and Jasper Counties. The extremes of these localities are shown on the map by the two circles near the Fall Line in the middle of the state. A second locality near the Fall Line at Thomaston, Upson County, where this vireo apparently breeds was discovered by Burleigh on June 14, 1957. Subsequently it was found breeding at Athens by Odum on May 16 and June 1, 1948, and by Johnston on May 12 and 26, 1949. It was not until ten years later in June 1958 that Boyd reported the first nesting at Atlanta.

Searches by the writer in the Piedmont near the Fall Line in eastern Georgia has led to the discovery of three additional localities where the Solitary Vireo was holding territory and apparently breeding. The first of these, already reported (*Oriole* 16: 25-30), was about one-half mile north of Little River in southern Wilkes County. The second site discovered on June 10, 1953, was beside Georgia Highway 43 in northeastern McDuffie County 3.3 miles south of Little River. The most recently discovered locality, found June 30, 1957, is beside Georgia Highway 104 just north of Pollard's Corner in Columbia County. This site, about nine miles west of the Clark Hill Dam and just 22 miles from Augusta, is the most southeastern point in the United States at which this vireo is known to breed.

In the region just above the Fall Line, and especially in eastern

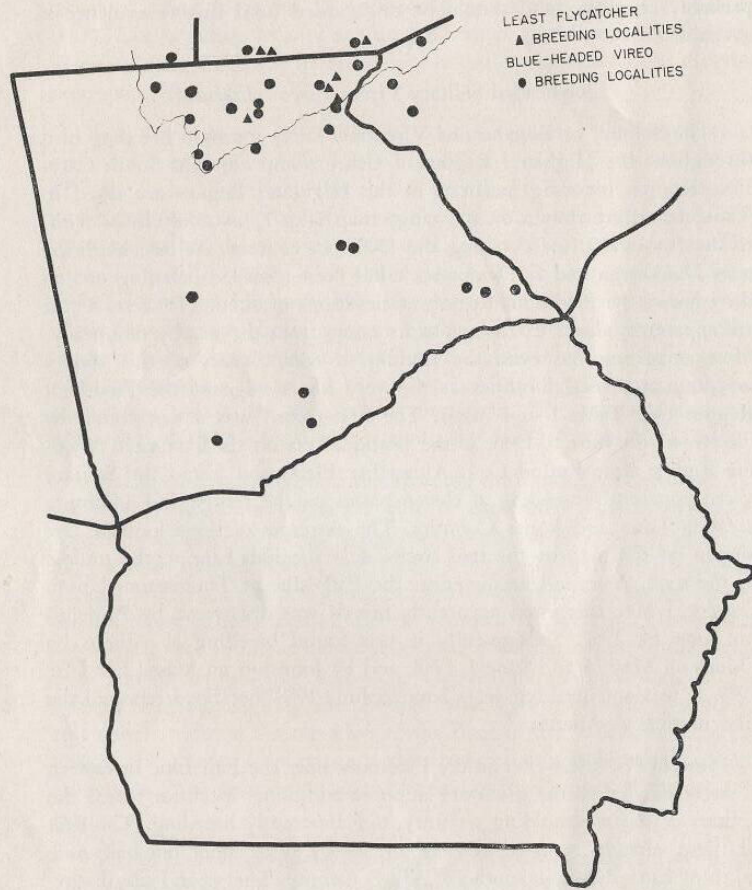


Fig. 1—Breeding localities of the Least Flycatcher and Blue-headed Solitary Vireo in Georgia and adjacent areas.

Georgia the Solitary Vireo inhabits practically pure stands of short-leaf (*P. echinata*) and loblolly pines (*P. taeda*) varying from 6 to 12 inches DBH, sometimes with an understory of hardwood saplings, sometimes with none. Nesting site seems unimportant as nests have been found both in pines and available hardwoods such as the persimmon (*Diospyros*

Table 1—Breeding localities of the Blue-headed Solitary Vireo in Georgia, dates of discovery and authorities.

A. HIGHLAND REGION

Camp Ray Rabun Co.
Camp Ray, Rabun Co.
Tullulah Gorge, Rabun Co.
Brasstown Bald, Towns Co.
Canal Lake Camp, Union Co.
Lake Winfield Scott, Union Co.
Margaret, Fannin Co.
Flatop Mt., Fannin Co.
Burnt and Oglethorpe Mts., Pickens Co.
Rich Mt., Gilmer Co.
Lake Conasauga, Murray Co.

May 11, 1947 Johnston, D. W. 1947 Oriole 12: 32-33
Summer 1941 Bell, G. W. 1941 Oriole 6: 36-37
Summer 1945 Odum, E. P. Personal communication
June 19, 1922 Burleigh, T. D. 1925 Auk 42: 396-401
May 22, 1923 Burleigh, T. D. 1927 Auk 44: 229-234
June 19, 1952 Denton, J. F. Unpublished data
June 19-20, 1957 Denton, J. F. Unpublished data
July 15, 1922 Burleigh, T. D. 1925 Auk 42: 396-401
May 29, 1945 Odum, E. P. 1945 Oriole 10: 15-19
June 23, 1945 Odum, E. P. 1945 Oriole 10: 48-52
July 8, 1908 Howell, A. H. 1909 Auk 26: 129-137
June 12, 1958 Denton, J. F. 1958 Oriole 23: 26-31

B. PIEDMONT REGION

Dahlonega, Lumpkin, Co.
Demorest, Habersham Co.
Athens, Clarke Co.
Atlanta, Fulton Co.
Round Oak, Jones Co.
Thomaston, Upson Co.
Southern Wilkes Co.

July 12, 1942 Odum, E. P. 1943 Oriole 8: 6-8
Summer 1960 Neal, D. P. Personal communication
June 6, 1948 Odum E. P. 1949 Oriole 13: 17-20
May 22-26, 1949 Johnston, D. W. 1954 Oriole 19: 1-3
June 1958 Boyd, E. 1958 Oriole 23: 43-44
June 16, 1946 Fleetwood, R. 1947 Auk 64: 462-463
June 14, 1947 Burleigh, T. D. 1948 Oriole 13: 34
June 22, 1949 Denton, J. F. 1951 Oriole 16: 25-30
May 30, 1950
June 10, 1953
June 30, 1957

Northeastern McDuffie Co.
Pollard's Corner, Columbia Co.

This paper
This paper

virginiana). In 1865 practically the entire lower Piedmont of Georgia was in cotton fields. In succeeding years these cotton fields have been gradually abandoned and allowed to grow up or been planted to pines so that now most of the lower Piedmont is covered with second-growth pines, forming an almost unbroken strip across the state parallel to the Fall Line. Why the Solitary Vireo, a "mountain bird", has colonized this hot, seemingly unattractive habitat, is not readily apparent. Possibly it is because this habitat is not regularly occupied by any other species of vireo. It is interesting to note and speculate as to why this vireo has not been found breeding in the Appalachian Valley in Georgia or anywhere in Alabama.

References

- Bell, Glenn W., 1941. The Least Flycatcher breeding in northeast Georgia. *Oriole* 6: 36-37.
 Johnston, David W., 1947. Interesting records from Rabun County, Georgia. *Oriole* 12: 32-33.
 Odum, Eugene P., 1947. The breeding of the Least Flycatcher in Rabun County, Georgia. *Oriole* 12: 5-7.
 Wetmore, Alexander, 1941. Notes on the birds of North Carolina. *Proc. U. S. Nat. Museum*, 90: 483-530.

1510 Pendleton Road
 Augusta, Georgia
 March 1, 1962

GENERAL NOTES

A SINGING BLUE JAY.—On February 17, 1962, while observing birds at a feeder outside our second floor kitchen window, we noted a Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) which paused on a branch about five feet from the feeder and began to sing. The notes were varied and jumbled, but musical, and reminded us of a subdued mockingbird song, but without the repetition characteristic of the latter. After one or two minutes another jay approached the feeder and both birds flew away.

Bent (Life Histories of North American Jays, Crows, and Titmice, 1946) states that "comparatively few observers are familiar with the song of the blue jay. When he sings, the jay . . . retires to the recesses of a wood or seeks seclusion in a thick evergreen tree and there, all alone, sings his quiet solo". Allen (Bent, *op. cit.*) heard the Blue Jay singing on three different occasions. On two of these the notes sounded like the goldfinch's song. Notes of another jay suggested a mockingbird's song. Bent's description of the Blue Jay's song is similar to the song we heard. He describes the song as ". . . a potpourri of faint whistles and various low, sweet notes, some in phrasing and pitch, suggesting a robin's song—a mockingbird might be singing, *sotto voce*. But as the song goes on one realizes that most of the notes are clearly in the blue jay's repertoire but are disguised by being jumbled together and delivered gently and peacefully". In the present instance the Blue Jay that we observed was singing out in the open in contrast to the singing jays reported in Bent. It is likely that more careful observations of this common suburban resident will reveal that singing Blue Jays are not too uncommon. HERBERT W. AND CHARLOTTE J. KALE, *Dept. of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, March 1, 1962.*

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER AT ROME.—For several winters there have been many pine warblers at a peanut butter feeder outside my window. Among these were some that did not appear quite the same as the pine warbler but I paid little attention to them. However, during the recent snow, I was at the window watching the birds at the feeder not three feet away. I suddenly realized that one of the birds I was watching was not a pine warbler. Looking carefully at this bird for the first time, I realized that there was no true yellow, not a mark anywhere, just an olive green all over, shading from light on the breast to dark on the back and to an almost blue-gray on the top of the head. It could be nothing but an orange-crowned warbler (*Vermivora celata*). There were at least two

of them since, as one flew away, another came in. They are still present. PHILIP HAM, *Rome, Georgia, Jan. 21, 1962.*

MISSISSIPPI KITES IN SCREVEN CO., GEORGIA.—Five Mississippi Kites (*Icteria mississippiensis*) were observed on June 19, 1961, on the J. K. Boddiford farm in Screven county. Their swallow-like flight and subdued colors of pale-gray underneath and darker above with black tail noted through 6X binoculars served to identify them. For more than 15 minutes the writers and David Boddiford watched them darting and swooping over a hay field bordering Buck creek half a mile east of state highway 24 and 3 miles west of the Savannah river. All birds appeared to be in adult plumage. Though the field was visited several times during the week, the kites were not seen again. The question may be raised whether these birds nest in this area. The nearest point where they have been recorded is Richmond county, 60 miles to the north (Burleigh, Thomas. *GEORGIA BIRDS*, p. 174-75). ANNE AND R. E. HAMILTON, *Dalton, Ga., Jan. 24, 1962.*

FROM THE FIELD

William Dopson of McRae noted 3 Greater Yellowlegs and two Lesser Yellowlegs at Little Ocmulgee State Park on November 4, 1961. On November 11 he noted 2 Ruddy Ducks, 1 Scaup, and 1 Canada Goose on farm ponds in Telfair County. On this same date he found a dead Henslow's Sparrow along a roadside in Telfair County. He reports Purple Finches in good numbers within the city limits of McRae this past winter.

Ivan Tomkins observed a Glaucus Gull on Tybee on February 3—the first in 10 years. On January 31 he noted a female White-winged Scoter along the front beach grubbing among the oysters, mussels, etc., instead of diving for food.

L. A. Wells observed the Solitary and White-eyed Vireo for the first occurrence in winter of these species at Columbus. Evening Grosbeaks were present there when he wrote on February 13. This species was also noted at the following localities: Waverly Hall, Georgia—first on Jan. 11 when one male appeared and up to twenty-eight individuals on Jan. 27. A flock of 14 was still present on February 5 when Mrs. Joseph Walter Jones wrote.

Jasper County—Mildred Grubbs reports the species on Feb. 18. Macon, Georgia—Dr. Tom Hall saw the species on Feb. 17 and 19. Mrs. Tom Cater et al noted them at Rock Eagle State Park on March 3 and the southern most record was made by Mr. I. N. Hayes at Warner Robins on March 14.

Katherine Weaver observed the Solitary Vireo and an Osprey at Milledgeville on March 4 and 21 Sandhill Cranes on March 10.

Milton Hopkins observed two flocks of Sandhill Cranes passing over Osierfield, Georgia on March 8 and 19 containing a total of 95 individuals.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

Announcement of the spring meeting: The spring meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Meeting will be held in Augusta, Georgia in April. All members will be notified within the next few days of details although the dates of April 27-29 have been set up for the meeting as of now.

Dr. Robert A. Norris has returned to Georgia from California and at the present time is working in Athens, Georgia.

WALTER J. ERICHSEN

Walter J. Erichsen died on February 10, 1962. He did a great deal of bird study in the Savannah area from about 1910 to the late 1930's. He seems not to have published anything later than given in the bibliography in 'Georgia Birds', but it is known that he deposited a number of notebooks on birds at the Georgia Historical Society, and later on more comprehensive ones at the Savannah Public Library. IVAN R. TOMKINS

BACK NUMBERS OF THE ORIOLE AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS OBTAINABLE FROM THE BUSINESS MANAGER.—Louis C. Fink, 688 N. Parkwood Road, Decatur, Georgia has indicated that all back numbers of The Orioles are available except the following out-of-print issues:

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Libraries and others who may wish to obtain a complete set of The Oriole should be encouraged to buy a set now while most of the numbers are still available. Anyone who buys a set now will be sent the out-of-print numbers as soon as they are reprinted. The price of the complete set, Vol. 1 to Vol. XXIV, is \$55.00. The majority of the back numbers of The Oriole sell for 50 cents each, however, there are several which sell for \$1.00 and a few for 25 cents each.

The following regional papers are also available: Birds of Athens, by Thomas Burleigh, 50 cents and The Birdlife of the Savannah River Delta, Gaviiformes through Charadriiformes by Ivan R. Tomkins, \$1.50.

RECENT LITERATURE

ALEXANDER WILSON: NATURALIST AND PIONEER—by Robert Cantwell, 1961, J. B. Lippincott Co., E. Washington Square, Philadelphia 5, Pa., 8 plates in full color, 12 in black and white, 319 pp., \$15.00.

This volume contains as complete a biography of Alexander Wilson as has been compiled. Quite naturally Wilson's ornithological endeavors have been treated with the most detail in this personal history of a man who was born in near poverty and yet reached the pinnacle of success in his chosen field.

Four sections deal with Wilson's birth in 1766 and young manhood in Scotland. Robert Cantwell traveled to Paisley, Scotland in order to gather heretofore unpublished facts concerning Wilson's early life.

Section IV treats his beginnings in America up to the time of his trip through the Eastern states to Maine from Philadelphia in search of birds and subscribers to AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY. In 1808 his first volume was ready for this trip. During the next few years he was to travel over 10,000 miles, most of it to be covered by stagecoach, horseback, and on foot.

Sections V to VII deal with more of his travels, insights into the heart of young America and his trip through the South. He met with much success in selling AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY in this section of the country and made many new friends. His encounters with the wild pigeons and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker are especially interesting.

Appendices include reproductions of court records of Wilson's arrest in Scotland, one of his poems, and as complete a list of original subscribers to AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY as Cantwell was able to gather including identification where possible.

Wilson's AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY was the first semi-popular treatment of the birds of the New World that had any appreciable distribution. His interest in other phases of early America and his thoroughness in recording his views have provided Cantwell with material for a very interesting volume both to the ornithologist and historian. MILTON HOPKINS, JR.

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FOOTNOTES—Avoid footnotes by incorporating such material in the text.

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