

THE ORIOLE

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No. 2

THE ORIOLE

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A CAPTIVE MARSH WREN HELPER

By HERBERT W. KALE II

Skutch (1961, The Condor, 63: 198-226) has recently published a comprehensive review entitled "Helpers Among Birds." He defines a "helper" as "a bird which assists in the nesting of an individual other than its mate, or feeds or otherwise attends a bird of whatever age which is neither its mate nor its dependent offspring." In this review he describes the status and activities of "helpers" and presents a classification of them under several categories within classes of "intraspecific" and "interspecific helpers". In addition he presents a systematic list of occurrences of helpers among birds in over 130 species which he has observed or found in the literature.

The purpose of this present note is to report an interesting occurrence of a helper among hand-reared Long-billed Marsh Wrens (*Telmatodytes palustris griseus*) which according to Skutch's classification would be classified as an intraspecific immature helper. During the summer of 1961 I hand-reared several Marsh wrens which were removed from nests in the salt marshes of Sapelo Island, Georgia, when between the ages of 7 and 12 days. On August 6, one of the fledgling wrens which was approximately one month old and was still being hand-fed, began carrying meal worms, small grasshoppers, and moths to a pair of younger fledglings in the room. It would first beg the food from me and then carry it to the younger birds. On one occasion it took a fairly large meal worm and was unable to point it down one of the gaping mouths—after trying several times, it gave up and swallowed the worm itself. Several days later it began picking up small worms and catching flying moths and carried these to the other fledglings.

In the wild, marsh wren fledglings are usually completely independent by the time they are a month old. However, captive fledglings, in general, tend to remain dependent upon their human foster parents considerably beyond the normal period. In this instance the major portion of

the helper's food was still being provided, and it can not be considered a very consistent helper in the feeding of the other wrens. Skutch (*op cit.*) states that "Their dedication to their self imposed task of feeding the nestlings is likely to be sporadic, spurts of activity alternating with periods of neglect, so that the nestlings would fare badly but for the steadier applications of their parents" (or their foster parents!). Skutch noted also that a large share of the records of young helpers refer to captive or semi-captive birds who live in an "abundance of food" and thus are able to respond to other begging young without depriving themselves of food.

The younger fledglings recognized this helper as a source of food, and would beg whenever the wren came near to them. The helper had two siblings of the same age which paid no attention to it, nor did they make any attempt to feed the younger wrens.

A few nights later this wren expressed its "helpfulness" in another manner. If I suddenly turned out the lights and plunged the room into darkness, the fledglings tended to fly in the dark and strike the walls or fall to the floor. Therefore, I made a practice of gradually darkening the room. This gave the birds time to find sleeping positions on the clumps of marsh grass which were provided for perches. One evening as I was darkening the room, the helper wren flew to a clump of grass in which was located a Seaside Sparrow nest—a favorite resting place. After settling down in the nest the wren began a subdued rapid twittering—a sound I had not heard marsh wrens make before. Immediately the younger wrens began approaching the nest and one by one settled down in it with the helper. Not until all of the younger wrens (four in all) were in the nest did the helper wren stop this twittering call.

Several days after the above incidents, it was necessary to cage all of the wrens and after this the wren helper made no attempts to feed or care for the other wrens.

This research was aided by an award from the Frank M. Chapman Memorial Fund of the American Museum of Natural History.—HERBERT W. KALE, II, *Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia and The University of Georgia Marine Institute Sapelo Island, Georgia, April 10, 1962.*

MORE DATA ON THE MISSISSIPPI KITE IN THE LOWER COASTAL PLAIN OF GEORGIA

BY IVAN R. TOMKINS

The recent note by the Hamiltons (Oriole, XXVII, 8) reporting the Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) over certain farm lands in Screven County, adjacent to the Savannah River swamp, is a reminder that certain other accounts of this species should be published to round out a little our knowledge of its range.

Burleigh, in "Georgia Birds" was a little vague about its range, and failed to list Murphy's account (The Bird Life of the Middle Savannah Valley, 1937, 11) of a pair he found twenty-five miles southeast of Augusta, in the neighborhood of McBean, Burke County.

It seems likely that this kite, like its close relatives, soars only on convection currents, and may at those times get some miles from its nest. An insect feeder, it may select favored localities, and may be seldom seen in other places. In several trips on the river, in Richmond and Burke Counties, it has often been seen going across the river, from the forest crown on one side to the other.

On May 22 and 23, 1948, I made an inspection trip on the tug "Merry Maid", from New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam, 12 miles below Augusta to the city of Savannah. The trip was made in daylight hours, and nearly all of that time I was sitting on deck with a folio of maps, notebook, and binoculars, looking at birds as well as attending to other duties. The kites were abundant down to about the lower edge of Burke County, but none were seen further down. This was reported (Auk, 66, 82) perhaps not too wisely, being based on a single trip.

In May and June, 1954, I made several trips from Haga-Slaga Landing to Poor Robin Landing, and saw numerous kites, very nearly in the locality mentioned by the Hamiltons.

On August 20, 1957, a single bird was seen for some minutes, soaring over the woods and fields, about five miles northwest of Purysburg, South Carolina, not far from the Savannah River swamp. This is not far from the Savannah River Wildlife Refuge, where E. O. Mellinger has not seen the species in several years of residence there. The locality is opposite Ebenezer Landing, Effingham County, Georgia. Yet several trips in summer on the river near Ebenezer have produced no kites.

In the upper edge of Chatham County, near the Ogeechee River, the speices has been seen twice, once in May and once in August. Near the Altamaha River swamp, at Everett City, in the northwest corner of Glynn County, E. O. Mellinger and I saw a kite or so, on June 11, 1960.

A couple of interesting notes can be added. Rhoads (Auk XXXV, 283 & 285) listed two paintings of the Mississippi Kite by John Abbot (No's 70 and 110) in the folio of Abbot paintings that were then in the DeRenne Library at Wormsloe. This folio is now at the University of Georgia. Then McAtee (Oriole XI, 4) thought it probable that the description sent by Abbot to John Latham, gave him the information on which he described *Falco plumbeus*, the "Spotted-tailed Hobby", as published in Latham's "General History of Birds", 1821-24. The young kite does have white spots on the tail.

1231 East 50th St., Savannah, Ga.
May 11, 1962.

Addendum:—Since submitting this note, some additional information has been received. On May 17, E. O. Mellinger saw a Mississippi Kite on Ga. 21, not far west of Monteith, Chatham County. Then, on May 19, members of the Adult Naturalists Club of the Youth Museum of Savannah, saw one kite overhead, from the banks of the Ogeechee River, near Paramore Hill, Jenkins County, about seven miles downriver from Millen. Among those who saw this bird were Dr. George Sciple, Hermann Coolidge, E. O. Mellinger, Marie Mellinger, Joyce Swanberg. I.R.T.

GENERAL NOTES

SNAKE SWALLOWS MARTINS.—On June 1, 1962 at 3:45 P.M., I glanced at a Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) pole near a farm house at Osierfield, Georgia and thought that the top cross arm supporting some of the gourds appeared "different" from before. Closer examination revealed a Grey Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*) approximately five feet in length draped over the arm. As I approached the pole and tapped on it the snake entered one of the gourds. More tapping failed to make the snake leave. I retreated and watched the gourd for 35 minutes. At this time the snake began coming from within the large gourd and climbed down the pole. The snake was caught and examined and had two large lumps in its stomach.

Avian predation has been noted in this species of snake on other occasions but this case seemed unusual in that the predator had climbed a three-inch peeled cypress pole and chose to enter one of the top-most gourds through a two inch diameter hole. This particular gourd was at least 20 feet above the ground.

A single female Martin fluttered before the gourd opening several times while the snake was inside although other martins present apparently ignored this act of predation. The snake was kept until the following day. It regurgitated a nestling which appeared nearly ready to fly and one lump still remained in its stomach. MILTON N. HOPKINS, JR., Osierfield, Georgia, June 7, 1962.

GLOSSY IBIS OBSERVED AT OKEFENOKEE.—The Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) is only an occasional visitor to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. On February 2, 1962, three of these birds were seen on the refuge in Gannet Lake Prairie by L. A. Worthington and me. One of these birds was seen in the same locality March 15 and two were seen there again March 28.

There have been only three previous reports of the Glossy Ibis in Okefenokee Swamp. One was of a single bird near Gannet Lake reported by John D. Eadie, September 16, 1950. Another bird was seen several times in Chase Prairie by Ramage I. Fulks, James Roberts, and several others in April, 1960. Another observation was of a flock of 14 which I saw at Billy's Lake September 6, 1961. EUGENE CYPERT, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Waycross, Georgia, May 19, 1962.

WOOD IBIS SPENDS THE WINTER IN OKEFENOKEE SWAMP.—The Wood Ibis (*Mycteria americana*) is normally a summer and fall visitor to Okefenokee Swamp. Most years these birds arrive the latter part of April or the first part of May and depart about the first of November. They are usually more numerous in years of low water.

Occasionally one or two Wood Ibises will stay through the winter. The winter of 1961-62 has been an exception. Hundreds of them spent the past winter here. On December 7, 1961 an estimated 500 were concentrated in Chesser Prairie. While they were not so concentrated, they were numerous in other parts of the swamp at this same time. November 22, 44 were seen between Minne's Lake and upper Big Water. December 18, 30 were seen on Billy's Lake. The ibises were less concentrated after the rise in water levels in January but they were seen on each trip into the swamp. On seven trips between Camp Cornelia and Gennett Lake between January 9 and April 20, counts ranged from a low of 8 on April 20 to a high of 62 on March 15. The birds were still common as late as May 12.

It is believed that Wood Ibises stayed through the winter because of favorable feeding and weather conditions during the fall and early winter. Last fall the water level in the swamp was below normal for the first time in nearly three years. This resulted in much stranded and easily available food. Coupled with this condition, unusually warm weather persisted until the cold snap December 29. Water levels rose to about normal during January. By this time it was too late for the ibises to migrate. EUGENE CYPERT, *Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Waycross, Georgia, May 19, 1962.*

MORE FULVOUS TREE DUCKS IN SOUTHEAST GEORGIA.—On January 1, 1962, while participating in the Brunswick, Georgia, Audubon Christmas Count I observed two Fulvous Tree Ducks, *Dendrocygna bicolor helva*, on the Altamaha Waterfowl Management area just south of Darien, Georgia, on U. S. Highway 17. This is the same location where this species was observed by Alan and Jean Craig on March 26 and April 2, 1961 (Oriole, 26:45). The two ducks remained together near a flock of several hundred Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis*, and did not appear to be as wary as the Scaup when approached from the road side. The tree ducks remained in the area throughout the morning and were also seen by my wife and Jean Craig. In fact, the ducks may be wintering there since Alan Craig stated that Mr. Phil Cannon has observed this species several times in the same area this winter.

The AOU Check-list (5th Ed., 1957) indicates that the Fulvous Tree Duck is accidental east of Louisiana. However, the appearance of this species in numbers in the Carolinas and Florida during the past few years, and more recently in Georgia (see Craig, *loc. cit.*, and Denton, 1962, Oriole, 26:53), suggests the possibility of an eastward extension of the winter range of this species. HERBERT W. KALE, II, *Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, March 22, 1962.*

BALTIMORE ORIOLES IN HOUSTON COUNTY.—In 1961 Baltimore Orioles (*Icterus galbula*) were seen at our feeder in Warner Robins, Houston County from January 23rd through April 22nd. This possibly represents both winter visitants and transitory birds. Judging by the differences in plumage there were 8 (eight) different individuals, possibly more, including adult male, female, and immatures.

One of the birds had an interesting habit. It fluttered in front of the picture window seemingly aware that there was a barrier there. Twice "he" settled on the sill outside the window facing inside and uttered a "churring" sound. Once he tapped at the window with his beak apparently trying to confirm that a barrier really was present. He came to the window sill and scolded on several different days. HEDVIG S. CATER, 315 Davis Drive North, Warner Robins, Georgia, March 27, 1962.

DICKCISSEL AT WAVERLY HALL.—A "new bird" arrived at the feeder of the William E. Johnsons in southeastern Harris County about Jan. 25, 1962. It was identified by their mother, Mrs. Felix Pierce, as an immature Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*). She says, "At the time it had no yellow on its breast. It was eating peanut cookies crumbled on the feeder. Later it started coming in with a flock of house sparrows and fed on grain from the ground. He is still present (March 22,) and comes in often through the day."

When the writer saw it recently it had developed more mature markings and appeared to be a young female. They first saw the dickcissel about four years ago, a male, on April 8, 1958. Not only are these the lone records for the area but the later is noteworthy for the reason that the bird is wintering here. L. A. WELLS, Route 1, Columbus, Georgia, April 15, 1962.

FROM THE FIELD

Roy Moore, of the Okefenokee Bird Club, reports the presence of the Red-breasted Nuthatch at close range within the city limits of Waycross on May 4, 1962. This is a very late record for the rare species in the southern part of the state. Mrs. Lois Groszmann, Mr. and Mrs. Roy Moore, Mrs. Lois Hafford and Kelly Lee of Waycross noted the Eastern Veery (2), Scarlet Tanager, Oven-bird, Black-poll Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and a single White-throated Sparrow on May 6, 1962 in the back yard of Mrs. Hafford in Waycross.

Emma J. Giffen in Albany reports the presence of a Dickcissel at her feeder from late January to early March 1962. She also noted Purple Finches in flocks of 20 to 25 during the past winter.

Father M. Martin, Monastery of the Holy Ghost, Conyers, writes and comments on several species in his area as follows: "The Red-headed Woodpecker has been noted only three times in an eight year period, once in the spring and twice in the fall. The House Wren has been noted only twice in eight years until this past winter when it remained throughout the season. Bewick's Wren has been a common winter resident until this past winter when it was not seen." Father Martin has a sight and song record of the Nashville Warbler on May 3, 1961. He has heard calls "identical to those of the Clapper Rail" in their (monastery's) marshy bottoms for three years in a row but has not definitely identified the species. Other records of his are White-breasted Nuthatch from Nov. 10 to Dec. 3, 1961, a Bufflehead on Nov. 13 and ten Evening Grosbeaks including several adult males on March 3, 1962.

L. A. Wells et al reports the following records from Columbus. Common Loon, 2 from Nov. 4 to Dec. 26, 1961; Horned Grebe, 2 from Dec. 13 to 30th; a disabled Oldsquaw on Callaway Garden waters on Feb. 4, 1962. The Solitary Vireo was noted on Jan. 14, 27 and Feb. 4, 1962 at Callaway Gardens. Pine Siskins were rather common near Columbus this winter and Fox Sparrows were observed until March 26. Others noted were Solitary Sandpiper on March 19, a dozen Pectoral Sandpipers on the same date and an estimated 100 Evening Grosbeaks on March 29.

Rev. Edward G. Nichols of Demorest observed many species of interest, a few of which are listed below: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Dec. 4 to March 12, Black Duck, 14 on Chatuge Lake Jan. 9. Canvasback (a

single at the same location), Common Merganser, 2 on Jan. 9, two Red-breasted Mergansers on Lake Burton on Jan. 9, and nine Goldeneyes on Lake Russell on Feb. 28.

He saw a Turkey in the woods of Lake Russell Game Area at about 1100 ft. elevation on Feb. 28. Rev. Nichols quotes: "Dr. Cyril S. Abbott, Prof. of Biology at Piedmont College, reported seeing three Ravens, which he identified by their soaring flight, on Dec. 20. He is familiar with Ravens in the west. Ravens have not been reported near Demorest before."

Continuing to quote from Rev. Nichols: "Black-capped Chickadee. I heard one singing several times in a thicket on a dirt road between Demorest and Clarksville, Georgia, on Dec. 15. I am familiar with the leisurely, two-note song of the Black-cap in the north. On the same day, Carolina Chickadees were singing their four-syllabled song in other places, but not with the Black-cap. This species is new to Georgia." It is quite possible that this species does come further south than North Carolina during the winter season although a specimen should be secured to substantiate the record.

Ivan Tomkins noted a male Scarlet Tanager on May 6 at Savannah. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Cater, Jr., comment on the status of the Common Egret around Warner Robins as follows: "In our immediate area the Common Egret is regarded as a summer visitant, occurring between Feb. 28 and Nov. 5. On December 26, 1961 we observed three at Houston Lake, Houston County. The lake had been drained this fall for the first time in decades. They were feeding in shallow water on the lake bottom. On February 3, 1962 one Common Egret flew up from the marshy edge of a pond in Pulaski County near the city limits of Hawkinsville."

NEWS AND COMMENTS

INFORMATION REQUESTED—J. C. Finlay, 6710-102 A. Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada is making a study of the Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) and would appreciate information on migration and population trends in North America. His study also includes the breeding cycle.

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RECENT LITERATURE

BIRD CASUALTIES AT A LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA TV TOWER, 1955-1961—by Herbert L. Stoddard, Sr., Bulletin No. 1, Tall Timbers Research Station, Tallahassee, Florida, 1962.

This bulletin covers the period between October 1, 1955 and June 30, 1961 at a TV tower located approximately one mile South of the Georgia-Florida state line and 20 miles north of Tallahassee, Florida. Over 17,000 birds comprising 150 species have struck the tower and 15,200 individuals have been satisfactorily identified. Mr. Stoddard stresses the extreme importance of weather patterns in relation to kills at the tower. No huge kills have been recorded in the spring but between 4,000 and 7,000 birds were killed on the night of October 8-9, 1955. April is the big migration month in the spring and October 1-15 is the peak of the fall migration in that area based on this study.

Thousands of man-hours have been put into this significant study that has added and continues to add valuable data to our knowledge of birds in this area especially in the field of relative abundance and migratory movement. Mr. Stoddard has indicated that a few copies of this bulletin remain and can mail one to interested parties.

ALABAMA BIRDS—by Thomas A. Imhof, 1962, Univ. of Alabama Press, University, Alabama. 591 pp., \$7.50.

This newest of the state bird books is profusely illustrated in color as well as photographs in black and white. The majority of the colored plates are done by Richard A. Parks in water colors with a few, especially in the waterfowl section, being done in oils by David C. Hulse. Most of the plates of smaller species are painted in "guide book" style and arranged with similar appearing and closely related species together. These plates do not have markers to the outstanding field characteristics but the illustrations are large enough to make these prominent. The color transfer process was well done in most instances but lacking in true-to-life colors in a few cases.

The introductory chapters include information on preparing for bird observation, history of ornithology in Alabama, physiography of Alabama, law and birds, migration, and banding. The sections concerning migration and bird banding are comprehensive and interestingly written. The

introduction to species accounts explains the binomial nomenclature system and why species are grouped in a particular order.

The book contains description of 352 species known in Alabama and this number includes 46 within brackets due to the fact that their status in the state is not completely acceptable. In the discussion of field marks the most prominent characters and descriptive words are italicized.

Species occurrence sections list first and last dates for migrants, local status in different physiographical sections, dates and where most were seen in a day, breeding information, and a discussion of banding for the species if evidence is available. Much trapping and banding has been done in Alabama as evident by return and recovery information in this volume. There are range maps for 62 species.

Imhof states that this volume can be considered as a progress report or "what we know about Alabama birds as of 1961." Subspecies are treated in a few cases. Sight records for most species are usually substantiated by at least one specimen although a hint of reliance on geographical and seasonal probability is to be found in a few of the accounts.

This is a beautiful book, well illustrated, and good for reference. It measures 7½" by 10" and weighs nearly five pounds. The volume is priced very reasonably and would be a welcomed addition to any southern ornithologist's library.

HANDBOOK OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS, Vol. 1 Loons through Flamingos.—Edited by Ralph S. Palmer, 1962, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 567 pp., \$15.00.

This volume is sponsored by the American Ornithologists Union and the New York State Museum and Science Service. The treatment of each species as it occurs in taxonomic sequence includes the following: "description of the species, including range or physical variation, plumage variations, geographic variation, and occurrence of hybrids; description of diagnostic characteristics; field identification, with plumage features, flight and other characteristics; description of voice, both vocal and non-vocal sounds, calls, songs; habitat by vegetation type and immediate environment; distribution in breeding and other seasons; migration, with arrival and departure dates, and postbreeding movements; reproduction, including age when breeding begins, details of territorial and pair formation behavior, and the remainder of the breeding cycle activities; survival

data (when obtainable); social, territorial, roosting, nesting, and feeding habits; and food items, proportions, and seasonable and geographic variations."

There are six colored plates and range maps (one of the latter for every species treated). A simplified and more universal color standard has been used and a color chart is included.

Maps show: 1. distribution in breeding season, by subspecies. 2. Winter distribution (by subspecies when feasible). 3. Main Migration paths in a few instances. 4. Areas of hybridization, in a few instances.

Sight records and photographic evidence of certain species have been included and evaluated in some cases. The reader may, and should refer to the introduction for the editor's definitions and explanations in order to better understand and evaluate evidence and facts discussed concerning life history details, e.g., the discardment of the term "fledgling period" will serve to clear up the described periods of nest residency.

Linear measurements and correct methods of obtaining them from specimens are illustrated along with general avian topography. A chart of ordinal characters for Loons through ducks is in the front of the volume and a complete list of literature cited is near the end of the book.

Four of the color plates are by Robert M. Mengel and two are done by Roger T. Peterson. There are many black and white sketches of characteristic positions assumed by the different species by Mengel.

This volume is for the serious ornithologist for in it he can find, I would venture to say, almost any information pertaining to the species covered, that is known or that has appeared in print. Dr. Palmer and the many contributors to this volume have done a very creditable job in assimilating so much useful information in one book. MILTON HOPKINS, JR.

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

NOMENCLATURE—Vernacular names are not to be capitalized in text. They are to be accompanied by appropriate scientific names the first time each species is mentioned. Show reference for long lists of scientific names (i.e., A.O.U. Checklist, 5th ed., 1957).

REFERENCES—When there are fewer than 3 references insert them in parentheses where needed in the text by author, journal, volume, pagination, and year of publication. Three or more references are grouped alphabetically by authors last names under "literature cited".

TABLES—Prepare tables in keeping with the size of *THE ORIOLE*. A good table should be understandable without reference to the text.

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