

THE ORIOLE

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No. 2

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A POTENTIAL BIRD EGG PROBLEM

By

George A. Dorsey

Occasionally an individual bird may lay an egg on the ground, rather than in the nest. These extra-nidal eggs may perhaps be regarded as anomalous and of no particular significance. Not much attention seems to have been given to them in the various studies of the breeding of birds, for I can find no mention of them in any of my reference material, and their occurrence has not seemed to be common. In past years I have found a very few of these "wasted" eggs, mostly of the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), and I took no special notice of them.

In the past spring season of 1964, a somewhat different situation seems to have developed in my present study area, the region about Rome, Ga., and the information I have obtained seems to warrant some kind of report being made, although I am making no claim that there is any real significance in the matter. If there should be some importance to these reports of extra-nidal eggs, however, I should be regretful if I had withheld the information.

In explanation of how I obtained most of the data, I should point out that I earn my living as a teacher in a private school for boys, where I teach introductory science to Grades 6, 7 and 8. My students all know of my interest in nature, and they often bring me objects that they find, or tell me of things they see. The observations of school children might be considered a somewhat poor source of scientific information, yet without these reports I should have no knowledge of the present problem. From the frankness of the manner of the boys, I have no reason whatever to suspect that any of their reports were fabrications. At the first I failed to see any possible significance in the reports, and I did not ask the boys for further information until later, after the accounts of finding the eggs had become fairly numerous. A good bit came spontaneously from the boys, with no apparent organized endeavor on their part. Here is a summary of the findings:

(a) Eggs seen and identified by G. A. Dorsey:

- April 11—G. A. Dorsey found one egg, House Sparrow, on the open lawn at the school.
- April 16—B. Bagley found one Robin egg (*Turdus migratorius*) on residence lawn.
- April 16—T. Magruder, two Robin eggs on school lawn, lying together on bare ground. One egg slightly undersized.
- April 28—D. Kilpatrick, one Flicker egg (*Colaptes auratus*), on lawn of residence.
- May 10—Mrs. W. F. Barron, Jr. (adult), one Meadowlark egg (*Sturnella magna*), under small magnolia tree on lawn.
- May 11—G. Frazier, one House Sparrow egg, in back yard.
- May 17—S. Ragsdale, one Starling egg (*Sturnus vulgaris*), on lawn.
- May 18—S. Ragsdale, two Robin eggs, on lawn of residence.
(b) Eggs reported, but not seen by Dorsey:
- April 17—(approx. date)—C. Jefts, saw a small blue egg, probably Robin, on grass near light post, city school football field.
- April 23—R. Wood, one Bluebird egg (*Sialia sialis*), found on lawn while mowing grass.
- April 24—R. Wood, one small light blue egg, possibly Robin, open grass, school athletic field.
- April 24—(approx. date)—P. Hibbets, one egg, probably Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), on lawn of residence.
- April 27—G. Griffin, one Meadowlark egg in pasture, found while weeding out thistles.
- May 1—(approx. date)—P. Mann, one egg, probably Robin, in home driveway, not disturbed.
- May 2—T. Glenn, two House Sparrow eggs together on back-yard walk.
- May 2—(approx. date)—D. Rogers, his sister found a Robin egg on the home lawn.
- May 2—W. Cochran, one blue egg, possibly Robin, in street gutter, not disturbed.
- May 3—J. Wyatt, one Robin egg, on grass near green, golf course.

- May 4—S. Patton, three Robin eggs, about an inch apart from each other, near another green, golf course.
- May 4—J. McGinnis, one Robin egg, on public school lawn.
- May 4—(approx. date)—L. Cathey, one small egg, spotted light brown, in clearing in wooded grove.
- May 5—(approx. date.)—L. Summer, his cousin found three eggs, probably Robin, on ground under pine near houses. All three within a 6-inch radius. Not disturbed.
- May 7—J. Norton, one egg, probably Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*), under pine tree.
- May 7—T. Toles, his mother saw the pet dog eat a small blue egg in the driveway at home.
- May 8—(approx. date)—J. Morgan, one small blue egg, and one House Sparrow egg, in home grounds.
- May 10—R. H. Cauthen, says his brother and sister saw a bird lay an egg on the ground, not identified.
- May 13—R. Wood, two Robin eggs in back yard, and one Robin egg in neighbor's yard.
- May 18—(approx. date)—J. Garner, Robin egg on lawn, which he did not disturb.
- May 23—(approx. date)—L. Cathey, one Robin egg in front yard, one Robin egg in back yard.
- May 24—C. McGhee, one egg, probably Flicker, on lawn.
- May 24—R. Johnson, one small light "blue-green" egg on lawn.
- May 25—(approx. date)—C. Wright, was with a group of children who found three small, brown-spotted eggs on lawn. Two were about a foot apart, the other several feet away.
- May 27—J. Dodd, two small eggs, white with brown spots, on lawn.

There were five additional cases heard of from other children, not in my school, and of doubtful value.

Something seems to be causing small songbirds to drop eggs on the ground, away from a nest, in numbers enough to seem to be unusual. Since some of these eggs were more or less together on the ground, this

might indicate some attempt on the part of the bird to follow the dictates of the breeding instinct, but in a perverted manner. Apparently all of the species reported here are ground-feeders, at least in part.

I can think of no good cause for the phenomenon, assuming that it might have any significance. We had an unusual amount of rain in the earlier part of the spring. Our county has not been sprayed with insecticides from airplanes. The usual sprays for ornamental plants are being used by an increasing number of people, and we seem to have an increase in the use of herbicides. The boys who made the reports did not know about the use of such chemicals in their neighborhoods, but they all said that no weed-killing chemicals had been used at their own homes. The gardener at my school had treated much of our lawn space with a weed spray in April.

All of the eggs mentioned were whole, unbroken, and found on the ground away from a nest. I have some of them in my possession, unblown, and would be glad to send them to anyone who might like to try a chemical test, although they are quite old by now.

Eggs which lie on the ground would probably be subject to predators, and not remain in this kind of location long. Children at play may easily find such eggs, where an adult observer might overlook them, or ignore their presence. Since I do not know of such an occurrence of numbers of these eggs having been found before, it might be well that I have reported it. Darlington School, Rome, Ga., June 13, 1964.

GENERAL NOTES

SIGHT RECORD OF THE MOURNING WARBLER.—On June 3, 1964, a Mourning Warbler (*Oporornis philadelphia*) flew across our yard and perched low in a clump of wild azaleas (*Azalea sp.*). Hastily grasping binoculars, I followed the bird as it worked its way through the azaleas and along the row of Van Houtte spirea which bordered the yard, then into shrubbery in a neighbor's yard. Sometimes it was within inches of the ground, sometimes as high as two feet above the ground. Once it ate something from a twig, and since I could see that the small food item was not a worm or caterpillar, I judged that it must be an insect egg.

What first attracted me to study this bird more closely was its similarity underneath to the Kentucky Warbler, my first view being of the yellow belly and under-tail coverts and the olivegreen back and tail. Then I saw a bluish-gray head. After watching it for ten minutes, I finally clearly saw the black along the lower bib where the hood joins the yellow breast and was sure it was a Mourning Warbler. The bluish-gray hood was in sharp contrast to the olive-green back. The black crape apron described by Peterson was only on the lower section of the bib and did not appear to be on the throat. There was no eye ring. I heard no sound from the bird. It appeared to be at ease and alert, showing no fear. It remained well within the shrubbery except for the initial flight across the open lawn to the azalea clump.

This constitutes the first record of this species in Whitfield County, and is one of few Georgia records. In addition to individuals seen by J. T. Park at Rising Fawn in May, 1885, and a bird collected by L. M. Taylor at Roswell on May 23, 1931 (Burleigh, 1958) one was collected by (Richard A. Parks in DeKalb County on May 7, 1956 (Oriole 22:20-21). Anne P. Hamilton, 704 Greenwood Drive, Dalton, Georgia, June 13, 1964.

THE COMMON LOON IN HARRIS COUNTY.—The following observations of the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) in Harris County, Georgia were recorded during 1960 while I was employed by the Ida Cason Callaway Gardens at Pine Mountain. Records of this species in the lower Piedmont of Georgia are scant. Thus, the construction of eleven lakes within the Callaway Gardens during the past fifteen years has created a rather unique group of resting stops for migrating waterfowl. These lakes vary considerably in size, though most are of less than ten acres. All loons observed were on either Robin Lake (40 acres) or Mountain Creek Lake (175 acres).

The only spring record of the loon during 1960 was a group of three birds sighted on Mountain Creek Lake 4 April. All three birds appeared to be in adult breeding plumage. The first fall migrant arrived on Robin Lake 8 November. This same (?) bird was observed off and on until 16 November. On 25 November a flock of 43 loons settled on Mountain Creek Lake about 5:00 P.M. Thirty minutes prior to that hour a careful examination of the lake with 20X scope had revealed only two loons. There was much activity-wing-stretching and diving- within the closely rafted flock. The following day, 26 November, one loon remained on the lake. This observation of the 43 loons is of great interest, as I believe it to be one of the largest congregations of Common Loons observed anywhere in the Piedmont of Georgia.

The last loon of 1960 was a single bird seen on Robin Lake on 5 December. Winslow M. Shaughnessy, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Comm., Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, April 30, 1964.

CAPTIVE GALLINULE IN ATLANTA.— There are not many records north of the fall line in Georgia for the Florida common gallinule (*Gallinule chloropus*) and it is described as a rare spring transient in the Atlanta area. This is the record of a bird kept in captivity from May 4 to 11, 1964.

David Mills lives with his family at 2530 Warwick Circle, just northeast of Atlanta in DeKalb County. A small branch of Peachtree Creek runs behind his home. On the morning of May 4 his children found the gallinule on the lawn across the street from his home, about 200 yards from the creek. The bird allowed itself to be picked up and caged.

The Mills family found the bird would not feed itself, so they force-fed it water and a soft mixture of pabulum. At my suggestion, they tried to feed the gallinule lettuce and other greens, but it would accept only the pabulum. It also refused chopped beef. When found, the bird was sleek and healthy-seeming, but lost its good appearance shortly. When I saw the bird on May 10, its red frontal shield was dried and wrinkled, and the bird seemed listless, although it pecked me feebly when I spread its wings. I found that one of the three long hind toes on the right foot was missing, although the wound was fully healed. The entire leg seemed to be paralyzed, and I could get no reflex action to it. When returned to the cage, the bird lay on its belly, with the bad leg projecting at an awkward angle. The Mills children told me the bird could move about by using its wings, but was apparently unable to walk.

After a week of captivity, the gallinule was obviously not improving. Its eyes seemed alert but it did not move and would not feed. The bird was released on the banks of the creek from which it had obviously come. There is good cover and we can hope it survived.—Louis C. Fink, 688 North Parkwood Road, Decatur, Georgia. May 15, 1964.

FROM THE FIELD

Two Horned Grebes in winter plumage were seen together with one Pied-billed Grebe on Race Track Pond in Warner Robins, Houston County by Tom and Hedvig Cater on February 2, 1964. They saw nine White Ibis flying in "formation" over the river flood plain in Houston County, on April 20, 1964.

William Dopson noted an estimated 200 Kingbirds near McRae on October 12, 1963.

L. A. Wells, of Columbus, sends seasonal records regularly. Below are some of his compilations for the spring season 1964. Two killdeer broods were successfully reared in early May, one at Callaway Gardens reported by Ted Ellis and one at Waverly Hall by Genevieve Jones and Mildred Pierce. Florence Lynn had the Whippoorwill calling from March 23 until June 1 when Mr. Well's letter was received. A Western Kingbird was noted on May 9, 1964.

An American Bittern was flushed from Jordan Marsh on April 5 by Dr. Bob Eggleston, Roberta and L. A. Wells. A Virginia Rail was picked up dead from the lawn of a neighbor of Dr. Harry Brill on May 3 near a low area after heavy rains and winds.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

THOMASVILLE BIRD CLUB—On March 31, 1964 a new bird club was formed at Thomasville, Georgia. There were over fifty members present at this organizational meeting. Miss Mildred Sue McKewen, P. O. Box 842, Thomasville, Georgia was elected president of the club. Mr. W. E. Freeborn of H. G. Hastings' Co., Atlanta Georgia was the guest speaker for the occasion.

Dr. David W. Johnston and Robert W. McFarlane were collecting specimens in the Osierfield, Georgia area in early June. Dr. Johnston for his studies in the thyreoidal, pituitary, and gonadal, developments in the Indigo Bunting and Mr. McFarlane for his taxonomic significances and differentiations in various and sundry species as evidenced by their sperm.

Minutes of the 50th. meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society.

The 50th meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society was held at the Dillard House, Dillard, Rabun County Georgia on May 1, 2, and 3, 1964. Registration totaled 84.

An informal meeting was held Friday evening with secretary Marie Mellinger in charge. E. O. Mellinger talked on birding in the Rabun County area and Mrs. Marene Snow talked on the geology and general background of the area. Briefing for field trips was given. On Saturday morning a field trip to Rabun Bald was made. Birding in Rabun Gap and the general area of the Dillard house was good. The Harris's sparrow was seen by many of the group.

The semi-annual business meeting was called to order by President James H. Jenkins at 1:30 Saturday afternoon. Minutes of the last meeting were read.

Mimeographed copies of the treasurer's report were passed around.

Louise Nunnally reported on the Ben Maulsby memorial. President Jenkins reported on the encephalitis study, and told members to watch for orchard orioles, catbirds, indigo buntings, wood thrushes, and red-eyed vireos with white or yellow feathers in their backs and to report such birds to the C. D. C. in Atlanta, Georgia.

Reports on regional activities were given by regional vice-presidents; Mrs. Thomas Cater, Louise Nunnally, Eugene Cypert, Ivan R. Tompkins, L. A. Wells, Kitty Weaver, J. Fred Denton, and Robert Overing.

Ralph Ramsey sent word that the slide collection had bogged down and suggested that the project be discontinued.

Ivan Tompkins suggested that Christmas Counts be arranged for different days so more members could participate in more counts.

Any members having reports on the bald eagle should send them to Alexander Sprunt, III

Mrs. Oliver made a motion that recognition be given to Ed Dodd, creator of the comic strip, Mark Trail, for the strips contribution to conservation.

It was suggested that the fall meeting be held around October 9, 10, 11, at Thomasville, Georgia.

Following the business meeting a technical paper was given by Herbert W. Kale, II.

On Saturday evening, Arthur A. Stupka talked and showed slides on the Smokey Mountain National Park. Sunday morning there was birding in the Rabun Gap area, and a field trip to Warwoman Dell.

The total number of species of birds observed was 103.

Respectfully submitted,
Marie B. Mellinger, Secretary

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:

Vol. V No. 3—September 1940

Vol. VI No. 2—June 1941

Vol. XII No. 4—October 1947

These out-of-print numbers will be reprinted as funds become available.

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:

The Birdlife of the Savannah River Delta, Gaviiformes through Charadriiformes by Ivan R. Tompkins, \$1.50.

RECENT LITERATURE

LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN FLYCATCHERS, LARKS, SWALLOWS, AND THEIR ALLIES. 1963 by Arthur Cleveland Bent, Dover Publications, Inc. 180 Varick Street, New York 14, New York. 555 pp. \$2.75

The present work is an unabridged republication of the first 1962 edition of Bulletin 179 of the Smithsonian Institution. It contains 70 full page plates and a total of 120 photographs.

Full life histories of 78 species and subspecies of North American flycatchers, larks, swallows, and other allies are given.

Each species is treated under the following headings: Habits, courtship, nesting, eggs, young, plumages, food, behavior, voice, range, casual records, and egg dates. All information of significance concerning a species that was received by Mr. Bent up until a very short time before publication date is included in each bulletin.

As a basis for further life history studies and as a check to see what is already known about the species this work cannot be matched. As in previous bulletins Mr. Bent relied heavily on observers throughout the country who were more familiar with a species than himself in drawing up the various accounts.

LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN WARBLERS. 1963 by Arthur Cleveland Bent, Dover Publications, 180 Varick Street, New York 14, New York. 734 pp. 83 plates, \$5.00

This is an unabridged republication of the 1953 edition of the U. S. Government Printing Office for the Smithsonian Institution, U. S. National Museum Bulletin 203.

The present work is contained in two volumes, each treating upwards of 50 species and subspecies in each volume. The 83 black and white photographic plates show a total of 127 pictures, most of which depict nesting sites of the various species. The volumes sell for \$2.50 each. Dover Publications has done an excellent job of reproducing these works. Milton Hopkins, Jr.

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Application for membership may be made to the Treasurer. *THE ORIOLE* is sent without charge to all classes of members not in arrears for dues. Send changes of address, claims for undelivered or defective copies and requests for information relative to advertising, subscriptions and back numbers to the business manager.

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Original papers in the field of ornithology are published in *THE ORIOLE*. Papers are judged on their contribution of original data, ideas, or interpretations and on their conciseness, scientific accuracy, and clarity.

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TITLE—The title should be concise, descriptive, and not more than 10 words in length. Avoid use of scientific names in titles if possible.

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 size of *THE ORIOLE*. A good table should be understandable without reference to the text.

ILLUSTRATIONS—Illustrations should be suitable for photographic reproduction without retouching. Colored plates will be charged to the author.

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