

# THE ORIOLE

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



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NO. 1



# THE ORIOLE

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## A STATEMENT OF POLICY

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## WILSON'S PLOVER: SOME EGG WEIGHTS

by

IVAN R. TOMKINS

The eggs of birds lose weight during the incubation period, but there is little factual information on this available to the general bird student. To obtain such data, it is necessary to locate the nest early, to weigh the eggs frequently, and be present at the time of hatching. Often several attempts must be made, only to find that the nesting is unsuccessful for one reason or another. After many years of acquaintance with Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius w. wilsonia*), a common breeding bird of our coastal region, I finally had such an opportunity in April and May, 1959. Finding a plover nest usually involves a lot of careful searching, but if the birds are nesting on the sand, and one arrives there just after dawn, before the breeze has arisen to erase the tracks, they may be followed to the nest. The many clear tracks at that time infer that the birds are quite active all night long.

This particular nest was in a low dune area with sparse vegetation, on the north end of Tybee Island, Georgia. It was not far from the location shown in the photograph of Wilson's Plover habitat, opposite page 51, in Burleigh's "Georgia Birds". I was never able to approach carefully enough to catch the incubating bird on the nest, although both birds were usually nearby while I was there.

The nest contained one egg when first located on April 20, and still but one egg on April 22. On April 24 there were two eggs, and on April 26 there were three. The eggs hatched on May 21, an incubation period of 25 days, unless the third egg was laid on April 25, when the nest was not visited. Each egg was numbered with a grease pencil. I visited the nest on 15 different days, and weighed the eggs on 13 occasions, as well as weighing the young birds on the day they hatched. Unfortunately each day's observation were recorded on one notebook sheet, which was removed each night, and not tabulated until some time later. Had all the weights been put on a single sheet, it would have been obvious that



some of the weights were inaccurate, and steps could have been taken to shelter the balances from the ever-present breeze. The chance to make such a study again may not soon come again, and with all their defects, the weights show that the loss of weight in the eggs proceeds on nearly a straight line all through the incubation period, and all the weights are tabulated below. It appears that the maximum error is in the neighborhood of 0.5 gram, with the usual error much less.

Weight of eggs in grams					
April					
	20	22	24	26	30
1		12.6	12.4	13.0	12.3
2			13.0	12.45	12.95
3				12.75	12.67
May					
	3	5	7	9	11
12.2		11.8	11.6	11.6	11.4
12.8		12.4	12.3	12.1	11.6
12.45		12.05	12.1	11.9	12.0
May					
	13	17	18	19	
11.4		11.25	10.8	10.5	
12.0		11.9	11.5	11.0	
11.8		11.65	11.3	10.9	

All the eggs were slightly pipped on the morning of May 17, but they did not hatch until four days later. All the young had hatched and were dried off on the morning of May 21. They weighed 8.8, 9.3 and 8.8 grams. I then went back 250 yards to the car for my camera, and when I came back they had left the nest and could not be located.

An adult Wilson's Plover, with little fat, weighs 70-72 grams, and this clutch of eggs represents about 50% of the weight of the parent. A clutch of four eggs of the Eastern Willet (*Catoptrophorus s. semipalmatus*) represented 65% of the weight of female willet (Unpublished MSS). The young plovers each weighed about 125% as much as the adult.

In an earlier paper (Auk, 61:259-269, 1944) the courtship and nesting, migration and time of breeding, were described. Now, some 20 years later, after observing this plover to some extent nearly every year, I can see no need for revising the account.

1231 East 50th St.,  
Savannah, Ga.  
February 8, 1965

## GENERAL NOTES

### NESTLING PREDATION BY HERONS IN A GEORGIA HERONRY

A note on feeding behavior of the Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) in South Carolina by Theodore A. Beckett (1964 *Chat* 28:93-94) prompts me to record an observation of similar behavior in a heronry on Sapelo Island, Georgia. Beckett reported finding remains of 50-60 nestling White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) in food regurgitated by nestling Black-crowned Night Herons in a heronry on Drum Island, Charleston, South Carolina. This heronry was comprised of 3-4,000 pairs of White Ibis and 100-150 pairs of Black-crowned Night Herons (and, presumably, lesser numbers of other heron species).

In early July, 1958, while John M. Teal and I were banding nestlings in the heronry at the north-end ponds on Sapelo, two almost fully grown Black-crowned Night Heron nestlings from the same nest regurgitated a nestling White Ibis and a nestling Common Egret (*Casmerodius albus*), respectively. In a nest several meters away a nestling Common Egret (also almost fully grown) disgorged a nestling White Ibis. The disgorged nestlings were probably not more than five days old when fed to the young.

There were approximately 2500 pairs of White Ibis, 75 pairs of Black-crowned Night Herons, 100 or more pairs each of Common Egrets and Snowy Egrets (*Leucophoyx thula*), and 50 pairs of Louisiana Herons (*Hydranassa tricolor*) estimated to be nesting in this heronry.

Although we frequently visited the heronry in 1958 these three observations were the only instances of nestling predation noted. The major portion of the food disgorged by all herons was fresh and salt water fish and an occasional frog or lizard. White Ibis nestlings regurgitated only red shrimp (*Paleomonetes* spp.).

Although I have not conducted a thorough literature search I am not aware of any published eyewitness accounts of predation on heron nestlings by adults of other heron species. Fred Schultz, the late Audubon game warden for the heronry on Alafia Banks in Hillsborough Bay, Florida, reported (fide A. J. Meyerriecks) frequent observations of nestling predation by adult herons. The high number of Ibis nestlings in disgorged food on Drum Island suggests that predation was frequently occurring there. It did not appear to be a common practice in the Sapelo Island heronry.



I am grateful to Dr. Andrew J. Meyerriecks for his suggestions and a critical reading of this manuscript. HERBERT W. KALE, II. *Encephalitis Research Center*, 4001 Tampa Bay Blvd., Tampa, Florida 33614, January 15, 1965.

#### NOTES ON PREDATION BY THE BALD EAGLE ON SAPELO ISLAND, GEORGIA

A pair of Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) successfully reared three young in a nest located on the west side of Sapelo Island, Georgia, in 1959, but have not nested there since that time. Feathers found under the eyrie in 1958 and 1958 indicated that Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*), Common Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*), and Snowy Egrets (*Leucophoyx thula*) had been fed to the young. Whether these were sick or injured birds is not known, however these species are common in the area and are relatively slow fliers. In addition, a heronry of Great Blue Herons is located less than a kilometer directly across the marsh from the eyrie.

On 18 July 1959 while walking along the south-end beach of Sapelo, I observed an adult Bald Eagle attempt to capture an injured immature Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) which was swimming in the water about 15 m (50 ft.) from shore. There was a strong southeasterly (onshore) breeze blowing and the eagle would head into the wind and swoop down on the gull which would immediately dive under water. The eagle would then swing back to the beach and make another pass at the injured bird. Each time the gull would dive seconds before the eagle reached it. After making twelve unsuccessful attempts the eagle landed on the beach. Prior to this attack and shortly afterwards it was seen swooping at flying terns without success. The eagle caused a huge flock of resting terns, gulls, skimmers, and other shorebirds to rise and move farther down the beach. The Bald Eagle does not appear to be sufficiently agile to capture healthy gulls or terns, or injured birds if they can dive under water, but undoubtedly more seriously injured or sick birds fall prey to this predator.

I am grateful to Dr. Glen E. Woolfenden for a critical reading of this manuscript. HERBERT W. KALE II. *Encephalitis Research Center*, 4001 Tampa Bay Blvd., Tampa, Florida 33614. January 15, 1965

#### FROM THE FIELD

Mrs. R. E. (Anne) Hamilton of Dalton along with several members of the Cherokee Audubon Society noted a Cattle Egret daily from February 14, 1965 to February 22, 1965. Mrs. Hamilton also reports two flocks of Sandhill Cranes passing over the Dawnville area of Whitfield County on March 18, 1965. There were approximately 100 birds in one flock and 23 birds in the other group. The cranes were seen by Mrs. W. C. Cox, Sr., Mrs. W. C. Cox, Jr., Mrs. Hermon King and Mrs. Hamilton.

Mr. Charles Elliott, Southern Field Editor of Outdoor Life, sent details of a Mourning Dove nest found on December 8, 1964 by Cornelius Lee in the backyard of his home in Decatur, Georgia.

Mrs. Gilbert (Mildred) Green of Fitzgerald noted a Dickcissel on February 27, 1965 at her home one mile west of Fitzgerald, Ben Hill County, Georgia. The bird reappeared several times during the day and was seen by other members of the family. This is the second sight record for this species in this area; one male was seen and heard singing by Milton Hopkins, Jr., and Milton Hopkins III on March 28, 1964. Harold Peters reported this species singing south of Fitzgerald several years ago but these present records are the only ones that I have knowledge of.

The first winter record for the Cattle Egret in the Fitzgerald area was made on December 30, 1964 when a single bird was noted one mile southeast of Fitzgerald. Milton Hopkins, Jr. also noted seven Cattle Egrets on March 18, 1965 in this same location. He found the Baltimore Oriole for the first time in that area on January 10, 1965 when a female or subadult came into a feeder on the south side of town. The bird was again noted on February 16, 1965. Sandhill Cranes in two flocks passed over Osierfield, Irwin County, Georgia on March 1, 1965. One flock of 48 came over at 12:15 P.M.; at 12:50 P.M. another flock of 31 passed over flying northwest. On March 15, 1965 another flock of 26 passed over going in the same general direction.

Mr. W. A. Wells of Columbus, Georgia noted an immature Bald Eagle over Lake Oliver on January 29, 1965.



## NEWS AND COMMENTS

A NORTH AMERICAN NEST-RECORD  
CARD PROGRAM

Beginning in January, 1965, the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University will operate a nest-record card program on a continent-wide basis and would like the assistance of everyone.

Through the cooperation of Dr. David B. Peakall and the Onondaga Audubon Society, the Laboratory has carried on a nest-record card program on a local basis for two years. The aim of the program which is similar to one used in Britain (see Mayer-Gross, 1962, *Bird Study* 9:252-258), is to collect specific data on bird reproduction in a form convenient for statistical analysis. The results of this two-year trial have been so gratifying that we are encouraged to make the program continent-wide.

For this to be a success we will need the cooperation of all bird observers in all parts of the continent, particularly the United States and Canada. We will also need—because we are certain that regional centers can handle the distribution of data cards and their return to the Laboratory better than individuals—the cooperation of all bird clubs and other societies whose members make field observations of birds.

The Laboratory will provide bird clubs or individuals with cards. The observers will record the contents of each nest found on a separate card and make dated notations on the same card for each subsequent visit to the nest. Each card will then contain all the data from a single nesting. While one observation of a nest will be valuable, additional observations over a period of days or weeks will increase the worth of the record. Our goal is to have hundreds, possibly thousands, of cards containing data on each species from all parts of its range.

We are well aware that there are other local nest-record card programs in this country and in Canada (see Peakall, 1964, *Audubon Field Notes*, 18(1):35-38), and, naturally, we do not intend to infringe on them in any way. We only hope that they will cooperate with us and help broaden the scope of the whole endeavor. The net result should be the accumulation of far more data on every species than heretofore and the centralization of these data for comprehensive and intensive study, much as is true of the bird-banding program of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. All of the information from our program will, of course, be available to anyone who is interested.

Clearly this is a program in which every person seriously interested in birds can participate, be he a seasoned nest finder or one who merely watches a nest from a window. Local organizations, or individuals not members of local groups, may address all inquiries and communications to the North American Nest-Record Card Program, Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14850. Olin Sewall Pettigill, Jr., Director.

ED. NOTE: I have a number of cards and can mail these to members of G.O.S. who wish to participate.



## RECENT LITERATURE

A NEW DICTIONARY OF BIRDS 1965 Edited by A. Landsborough Thomson, McGraw Hill Book Company, 330 West 43rd St., New York, New York, 928 pages, \$17.50.

The present work is the result of a special enterprise undertaken by the British Ornithological Union in 1959 as a service to ornithology on a worldwide basis. Sir Landsborough Thomson recognized from the outset of this project that the cooperation of scores of specialists in the ornithological field as well as authors, photographers, and artists would be necessary for the completion of a work of this kind.

The *Check-list of Birds of The World* by J. L. Peters is the mode of classification down to familial level followed in this volume. It contains sixteen pages of color plates, 32 pages of black and white photographs and over 300 line drawings.

The dictionary is a comprehensive work consisting of articles of encyclopedic length, e. g. the listing "Development, Embryonic" covers ten pages and is an excellent introductory course in avian embryology. It also contains short definitions of less than five words and other entries defining special terms or the application of names. Listings are in alphabetical order and are cross indexed.

The book is intended for three general reader types: 1. the general reader who wishes to extend his knowledge of birds, 2. the ornithologist requiring information outside his specialty field, 3. the biologist who wishes to use the specialized subject-matter of ornithology.

In subject matter where controversy is prevalent the treatment attempts to present more than one point of view. An example of the type of subject matter covered can be illustrated by the entry "Darwin's Finches". This particular subject is covered precisely, correctly, and in three short paragraphs by David Lack, an authority who has previously spent time in the Galapagos Islands with the finches and has written a full length book on the subject. Because these finches provided one of the chief stimuli for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution they are of great historical interest and the pertinent and most significant conclusions produced from a study of them should be a part of all biologists' knowledge.

This book is highly recommended to any biologist and to ornithologists in particular who wish to obtain a currently acceptable definition or explanation of almost any term related to avian biology as viewed by excellent authorities. Milton Hopkins, Jr.

STUDIES IN THE LIFE HISTORY OF THE SONG SPARROW, by Margaret Morse Nice, 1964, Dover Publications, Inc., 180 Varick Street, New York 14, New York. In two volumes, Vol. 1, A Population Study of the Song Sparrow, 246 pp., \$1.75, Vol. 2, The Behavior of the Song Sparrow and Other Passerines, 328 pp., \$1.75.

Vol. 1 was originally published in 1937 as Vol. IV of the Transactions of the Linnaean Society of New York. Vol. 2 was first published in 1943 as Vol. VI of the Transactions of the Linnaean Society of New York.

Vol. 1 deals with a common and widely distributed species, the Song Sparrow, in an intensive study from 1926 to 1936 at Columbus, Ohio. It contains life history statistics of a particular group of individuals but is also related to the behavior of other passerine species. Vol. 2 deals with passerine behavior with the Song Sparrow as the chief illustrator. Both volumes are based on intimate studies of known individuals. The study was a somewhat unique one in that Mrs. Nice saw and recorded exactly and precisely what the individual Song Sparrow did in relation to itself, how it reacted to others of the same species, and the similarities and differences of this species' behavioral patterns compared with other passerines.

The exhaustive bibliographies compiled by Mrs. Nice and included in this life history study are useful and applicable to a great number of ornithological investigations. This classic in the biological investigational field is probably still referred to and consulted more often than any other single ornithological research publication. The opportunity to own these Dover reprints at the present price is welcomed. Milton Hopkins, Jr.

LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN WOODPECKERS, 1964, by Arthur Cleveland Bent, Dover Publications, Inc., 180 Varick Street, New York 14, New York, 334 pp., \$2.75.

This volume is an unabridged republication of U. S. National Museum Bulletin No. 174 originally published in 1939. It contains 39 plates with 78 black and white photographs and describes the life histories of 64 species and subspecies of North American Woodpeckers.

The well documented account on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and prognostications concerning the probability of its survival and present-day status is probably the most absorbing of the species accounts in this particular volume. Milton Hopkins, Jr.



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