

# THE ORIOLE

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# THE ORIOLE

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## BIRDS OF ATHENS: ADDENDA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SANDY CREEK MARSH

ELLIOT J. TRAMER

Five months have passed since I compiled a list of the birds of Athens (Tramer, E., 1968, A revised list of the birds of Athens, Georgia, and vicinity, *The Oriole* 33(1):2-17). In that brief time enough significant records have occurred to warrant a follow-up article. Particular mention will be made at the end of this paper of a "newly-discovered" marsh in Sandy Creek bottoms. The following additions to the Athens list should be noted:

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*): A single bird at the University beef cattle barns on March 22, 1968, is the second record for Athens. In addition, Richard Peake reports seeing a "small flock" flying over the Athens airport on May 8, 1968.

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*): A bird calling in the Sandy Creek marsh on June 10, 1968, is the third record for the area, and suggests the possibility that the least bittern breeds at Athens.

Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*): Recent summer records include a pair at Sandy Creek marsh on June 10, 1968, and a single bird on the Oconee River on July 21, 1968. I have seen singles and pairs of black ducks throughout May and June in Sandy Creek bottoms, and am quite sure they regularly breed there. Mr. Richard Heard reports finding a nest containing eggs in Sandy Creek bottoms in 1966; this is the only direct evidence of breeding. The status of this duck in Athens deserves investigation, since there is no official nesting record for Georgia (Burleigh, 1958, *Georgia Birds*, U. of Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 133).

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*): New earliest spring date, April 2, 1968.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*): Second record for Athens, several flocks seen by Jim Kilgo on March 10, 1968.



Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*): The second record for the area was a lone bird seen on April 9, 1968, in a young loblolly pine near the fire tower south of the University campus. The owl was discovered by Dr. E. E. Provost's ornithology class, and was subsequently seen by at least 50 people and photographed by Mr. Richard Rhindress.

Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*): One bird circled over Sandy Creek marsh on June 10, 1968. It called several times, and was then joined by three (noticeably larger) common crows, which soon chased it off to the south. This is the second record for Athens.

Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Hylocichla minima*): New earliest spring date, May 12, 1968.

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*): I found three pairs breeding in a 50-acre mixed woods at Whitehall this summer (1968), my first breeding records for this species in four years at Athens. Single fledglings were observed on May 29 and June 4. This bird is apparently a very local summer resident.

Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica caerulea*): New earliest spring date, April 18, 1968.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*): New latest spring date, April 30, 1968.

Bay-breasted Warbler (*Dendroica castanea*): New earliest spring date, April 24, 1968.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*): New earliest spring date, March 10, 1968 (Richard Peake, pers. comm.).

Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*): The unmistakable song of this species was heard by the author in Sandy Creek marsh on June 10, 1968. Unfortunately, efforts to locate the bird failed. This is 21 days later than the latest spring date for Georgia given by Burleigh. Since the known breeding range of this species extends northward from central Illinois, West Virginia, and Chesapeake Bay, it is unlikely that the bird was anything more than a very late straggler.

On the morning of June 10, 1968, I took an exploratory canoe trip down Sandy Creek accompanied by two fellow zoology graduate students, James A. Marsh, Jr., and Richard S. Murlless. We put in on Georgia Route 334 in Jackson County and canoed southward about eight river miles to the U.S. Route 441 bridge just north of the Athens city limits.

Just after entering Clarke County Sandy Creek ramified repeatedly, spreading out to form a wide, open marsh choked with pickerel weed (*Pontederia*), arrowweed (*Sagittaria*), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus*), grasses, and sedge. We estimated the area's size at between 60 and 80 acres. There was no hint of the marsh's existence on our topographical maps; apparently the marsh vegetation was not distinguishable in aerial photographs from the surrounding swamp forest.

All four sightings on the preceding list dated June 10, 1968, were made during our one-hour stay in the marsh. I must add a sad postscript to the description of this remarkable area: The U.S. Soil Conservation Service, in cooperation with the Clarke and Jackson County commissioners, has begun the Sandy Creek Watershed Project. Included in the plans is a dam which will be built across Sandy Creek about 1.6 river miles south of the Clarke County-Jackson County line. The resulting lake will extend upstream well into Jackson County obliterating the marsh as well as many acres of floodplain forest.

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## GENERAL NOTES

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAKS IN SMALL FLOCK IN ATLANTA—The sighting of a flock of at least six Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) in Atlanta in the fall contradicts some of our notions of this bird's behavior. Burleigh (1958. *Georgia Birds*. U. of Okla. Press, Norman, Okla.) speaks of "an occasional bird" in the fall migration. Similarly, Dr. Norman P. Hill (1965. *The Birds of Cape Cod, Massachusetts*. William Morrow & Co., New York) describes the rose-breasted grosbeak as a rare spring and fall migrant on Cape Cod, and he adds: "always single birds." My own spring and fall records of this lovely bird have always been of individual birds.

On September 29, 1968, I was watching a solitary sandpiper on the flat margins of Intrinment Creek in the southern part of Atlanta. Across the creek, six feet off the ground in scrub vegetation, I saw three immature grosbeaks. A few yards down the Creek, I saw six birds of the same size: three displayed themselves as adult male grosbeaks, with varying amounts of the red breast showing. I believe that the three which disappeared into the brush were females, but I could not get a good look. The grosbeaks moved up and down the creek in a loose flock, and I could not count them accurately. The total was at least six, maybe more.

Since these birds seem to migrate singly, and Chapman (1940. *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*. D. Appleton-Century Company, New York) says the grosbeaks lay four to five eggs, I wonder whether I could have seen a family group recently down from the north Georgia mountains. Note also that these birds were never more than six feet above the ground, often lower. Arthur A. Allen (1964. *Song and Garden Birds of North America*. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.) says, "In fall . . . they hide in the leaves at the top of tall trees." — Louis C. Fink, Apt. 913, 620 Peachtree St., N.E., Atlanta, Ga. 30308.

ANOTHER RECORD OF WESTERN KINGBIRD—On September 15, 1968, I found two Western Kingbirds (*Tyrannus verticalis*) at the Intrinment Creek Water Pollution Control plant in south Atlanta. Oddly, the birds were apparently feeding on closely mowed grass and at first glance I mistook them for meadowlarks. Flushed, they flew to perches in the tops of 50-foot trees and displayed their white-bordered black tails. Previous records of this bird in Atlanta were in February and May, and I find no Georgia records as early as September. Perhaps it is becoming a regular transient as suggested by Burleigh (1958. *Georgia Birds*. U. of Okla. Press, Norman, Okla.)—Louis C. Fink, 620 Peachtree Street N.E., Atlanta, Ga. 30308

SOME ODD NESTING SITES—Occasionally birds build and locate their nests in an unusual manner, some species more frequently than others; e.g., the books are full of descriptions of odd nesting sites of wrens.

The notes following describe out of the ordinary nesting sites for several species located in south Georgia in recent years.

April 15, 1954. A Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) nest was located resting on a 2" x 6" pine board about twelve feet above ground level in the framework of a barn seven miles east of Fitzgerald, Ben Hill County. The adult bird was incubating on the usual bulky stick nest.

June 12, 1954. A nest of the Brown Thrasher containing four young about one week old was found on the ground beneath a tobacco stalk. Ground nesting of this thrasher is not uncommon in some parts of the country, but is of rare occurrence here.

April 4, 1960. A nest of the Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) was located in a hollow stump standing in the water of a farm pond near Osierfield, Irwin County. It contained two eggs.

February 18, 1961. A Mourning Dove nest was found built over an old nest of the Cardinal about seven feet above the ground near Osierfield. It contained two eggs. I have also located nests of this species built over squirrel nests and over nests of several species of birds remaining from the previous nesting season.

May 16, 1961. A Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) was noted feeding young in a six-inch stove flue sticking horizontally from a farm house at Osierfield. The young birds were over twenty-four inches back in the flue.

May 15, 1964. A Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) was observed feeding young which were in the cranial cavity of a large mule skull hanging from a tree about fifteen feet above the ground near Osierfield.

June 15, 1966. A "nest" of the Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) was located in a bowl shaped depression of sand under a tobacco stalk on the ground near Osierfield. There was absolutely no nesting material under the fourteen eggs.

June 18, 1966. A Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) nest was located in the hollow top of a large fence post near Fitzgerald. The nest was approximately fourteen inches down from the top of the post and consisted of a few sticks and rootlets. It contained three eggs.

August 4, 1962. I watched two Carolina Wrens feeding four young in the back of a nickelodeon playing full blast at Osewichee Springs, Wilcox



County, Georgia. There was much noise in addition to the music box, but the adults were making regular trips to and from the nest to feed their young. Milton Hopkins, Jr., RFD 5, Fitzgerald, Georgia.

**CARRION CONSUMPTION BY BIRDS OTHER THAN VULTURES**—Several species of birds besides vultures eat carrion on occasion. This food habit does not seem to have a seasonal trend. A few observations concerning this consumption of dead and decaying flesh that occurred in south Georgia over the past few years are presented here.

February 14, 1964. A Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) was noted eating carrion on an Irwin County roadside.

May 1, 1964. Another Red-headed Woodpecker was noted feeding on what appeared to be a rabbit carcass. Each of these instances involved an adult bird.

May 22, 1966. A Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) was seen eating unidentified carrion on a roadside in Irwin County.

June 22, 1966. Two Blue Jays were noted feeding on the remains of a Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina*) on a highway six miles east of Douglas, Coffee County.

February 6-18, 1967. A Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) was noted feeding on the remains of a bird dog on a roadside in Ben Hill County during this particularly cold period. The bird flew from the dog carcass to a fence post nearby as vehicles passed and then returned to peck and pull on parts of the carcass from time to time.

February 22, 1968. A Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) was noted feeding on a dead Yellow-shafted Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) on a roadside in Ben Hill County.

June 6, 1968. Two Common Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) were seen eating a dead Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*) on a highway near Osierfield, Irwin County. Milton Hopkins, Jr., R.F.D. 5, Box 113, Fitzgerald, Georgia.

**A DISPUTED NEST SITE**—On May 16, 1960, at 10:00 A.M. my attention was directed toward a bird nest about 20 feet above the ground in a large slash pine growing on the edge of a farm pond at Osierfield, Irwin County, Georgia. It was so directed due to loud and strident alarm notes coming from a pair of Kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) and a pair of Orchard Orioles (*Icterus spurius*) occupying the tree. A few minutes preceeding this observation a pair of Kingbirds had made several trips from across the pond carrying nest materials, and I had watched them place these materials in a partially completed nest.

Between two of the latter trips a pair of Orchard Orioles, the male in full adult plumage, also flew up to the nest. Both the male and female oriole landed on the rim of the nest with nesting material. When the kingbirds returned one of them chased the female oriole off through the tree limbs while the male oriole flew about six feet from the nest and perched for several minutes. Later at noon for about 30 minutes and again from 4:30 to 5:00 P.M., I watched this nest but saw no sign of any of the birds. On May 17 the nest was again watched for some time. On this date the kingbirds had established ownership of the nest in the large pine tree, and the orioles were building another nest in a smaller pine about 20 feet away.

It would be interesting to know if both species involved actually brought the nest to the stage in which I first saw it. It seems more likely that this was an attempt at nest piracy by the orioles and the kingbirds overruled the attempt.—Milton Hopkins, Jr., R.F.D. 5, Box 113, Fitzgerald, Georgia.



## RECENT LITERATURE

**HONEYBEES FROM CLOSE UP**, by Arthur M. Dines, 114 pages, with more than 80 photographs by Stephen Dalton in black and white. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 201 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003. \$6.95.

This compilation of information about the honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) should interest any G.O.S. member except those who have already made a complete study of this social insect.

The author teaches in a London secondary school. His writing style is bright and lively, and his excellent organization has enabled him to include a wealth of detail. The photographs, many in microscopic detail, are integrated with the text so that the reader follows the account naturally and easily.

Man values the individual human life; birds strive to perpetuate species even at the cost of individual lives; honeybees devote all their efforts to preserving the colony. Individuals die when their assignments are completed. Specialization is intense: doorkeepers, foragers, queens (who lay eggs for months after one insemination), and fanners who keep air in circulation. Moisture and humidity are carefully maintained inside the hive. After man, bees may have the best communication of any animal: when a forager bee finds food, he does not guide the other bees to the food; he directs them — by means of dance which clearly indicates direction and flying time (adjusted for the prevailing winds!).

The author does not stick to London but ranges the world. Honeybees are not native to the United States, but were introduced by colonists. He discusses the development of races of bees, and believes that bees reached their evolutionary peak long before other species. — Louis C. Fink.

**SONGBIRDS IN YOUR GARDEN**, by John K. Terres. New, expanded edition, 1968. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 201 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 200 pp., 43 pp. appendix, index, numerous illustrations by Matthew Kalmenoff. \$6.95.

Trying to review this book is like trying to review a one-volume encyclopedia: It contains that much information. In the foreword the author writes, "If you will follow the instructions in this book, your yard will attract birds, whether it is in the city or in the country". He might well have added, "No matter where in the U.S. you may live".

The eleven chapters cover such aspects of attracting birds as feeding, building and placing birdhouses, providing water for drinking and bathing, and ornamental plantings. There is a chapter on helping birds at nesting

time, one on the care and feeding of young birds, one on hummingbirds, and one on special problems one might encounter. The appendix includes information tabulated by regions on plants that are especially attractive to birds, on what to feed birds, on nesting records for garden birds, and a list of references. Many anecdotes from the author's extensive personal experiences in attracting birds enliven the text and contribute additional information.

This is a fascinating book which everyone could read with pleasure for the insights into the lives and habits of many species which it provides. I intend to follow some of the instructions to increase the numbers of birds in my own yard. L.B.D., Jr.



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