THE ORIOLE

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THE ORIOLE

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

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DOES THE LITTLE BLUE HERON BREED IN THE WHITE PLUMAGE?

Milton N. Hopkins, Jr.

Palmer (1962) under the heading of "Reproduction" for the Little Blue Heron (Florida caerulea) states "Age breeding begins not known exactly, but numerous references to breeding of white or pied birds suggests breeding at one year (e.g. Wayne 1910, Bangs 1915, Eyles 1938, Neill 1949, and Observations of A. Meyerriecks)." For years the assumption or inference of the species breeding regularly in the immature plumage has been too faithfully copied in the ornithological literature.

My experiences in eight heronries in south central Georgia dating back to 1942 have indicated that, at least for this section of the South, white or pied-plumaged birds do not breed. Little Blue Heron nests examined in this area have numbered over 1200. This figure represents a nest count for rarely were both parents present on any particular observation.

Several of Palmer's references merit close scrutiny. Neill (1949) stated "The Little Blue Heron occasionally breeds while still in the white plumage; but this fact does not seem to be widely known." His observations were made at a heronry in Emmanuel County, Georgia, on 18 June 1948 and he did not report any corroborating evidence to support his assumptions made on this date. Neill further states "...about 95 individuals were present. Of these, all but two were in the white juvenile plumage." He further surmised "...since many of the nests contained only one or two eggs, probably the birds in the white plumage laid smaller clutches." His observations were made in the latter part of June when nesting of this species, to my knowledge, is almost completed in Georgia.

Many of the misleading assumptions, in my opinion, have arisen from the fact that the Little Blue Heron is an early season nester and observation of these colonies late in the nesting season does give one the impression that most birds present are white plumaged. These white plumaged birds are free flying and are milling about the colony alighting on nests and nest trees, but are wholly or partially parent-dependent for their food. When most of the eggs have hatched and the nestlings are being fed, very few adult-plumaged birds are seen in the heronry for they tend to come and go in small numbers or as individuals.

Eyles' (1938) study on Tybee Island, Chatham County, Georgia, was done mostly from 5 to 21 of June 1938. His only reference to the species in question was "One Little Blue Heron was observed nesting in the variegated plumage." Neither he nor Neill reported a direct observation of incubation, feeding of young, or brooding of young by white-plumaged Little Blue Herons. In addition neither of these authors reported seeing white-plumaged herons copulating or engaging in courtship displays, so evident in the adults.

Meanley (1955) has made exhaustive studies in Little Blue Heron nesting sites in Arkansas and states "Several authors have reported all three color phases in a Little Blue Heron colony. At Wilmot, Arkansas, in June 1910, Arthur Howell (1911) wrote of finding three phases about equally represented." Meanley found only adult blue phase birds nesting at Swan Lake. He states "White and intermediate birds roosted at the heronry during the early part of the nesting season, but later they roosted near the rice fields in which most of them fed during the day." Recently (pers. comm.) Meanley said, "I have never seen the Little Blue Heron breeding in the white or pied plumage."

Wayne (1910) stated, "I have often seen the immature (white) birds mated with the adult (blue) birds, and I think this fact has escaped the notice of most ornithologists." He did not report these immature plumaged birds incubating or copulating.

Tomkins (1958) wrote, "Within my own experience, but one instance came under observation, of a bird partly white and partly blue (the pied plumage) sitting on a nest on Hutchinson Island." In the past Tomkins and I have discussed this breeding instance and he was of the opinion that it represented a rare occurrence.

Dusi (1967) color banded 686 Little Blue Heron nestlings at three colonies in Alabama in 1963-1964. He stated, "Observations of returned birds of the Opp and Pansey colonies in mid-March, 1964-1965, showed only birds in adult plumage were present . . . the Pansey area contained three birds in mottled plumage on 13 May 1964, one of which bore color bands for that colony . . . the one returning bird at the Pansey colony provided some data of additional interest. The literature (Bent, 1926, and Palmer, 1962) contains many references to the mottled plumage and nesting the summer after birth, but no concrete evidence is presented to establish precisely the age of the birds. The color-marked returnee to the Pansey area had a few blue feathers in the white plumage and was incubating eggs in its nest when it was first disturbed and observed. Therefore, validity is given to the idea that Little Blue Herons will nest the season after birth, that they start to acquire mottled plumage at that age and will breed in mottled plumage."

This recent evidence of pied-plumaged birds breeding is undeniable; however, I feel quite strongely that the Little Blue Heron never breeds in the white plumage and only on rare occasions in the mottled plumage.

In the combined total of nests in colonies reported on by Dusi (1967), Hopkins and Dopson (1967), Hopkins and Murton (1969), Meanley (1955), and Tomkins (1958), over 2,000 nests are represented and only two cases of yearling or pied-plumaged birds incubating were found. No entirely white-plumaged birds were reported breeding by any of these investigators.

Dusi (pers. comm.) recently stated, "Since 1952 Rosemary and I have studied 19 colonies in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. I conservatively estimate that we have seen a total or 4,161 nests. We have seen 13 white or mottled birds on early dates in these colonies. We can assuredly report only those mottled and no white Little Blue Herons actually nesting. From this we have concluded that the incidence of nesting mottled birds is no more than one per thousand nests and that no white birds nest."

The belief that nesting by these immature white-plumaged birds is a common practice as has been reported in ornithological literature in the past cannot be documented at present.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The manuscript was read critically by Drs. Oliver L. Austin, Jr., D. W. Johnston, and Brooke Meanley. They made many valuable suggestions.

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PREDATION ON BIRDS KILLED AT TV TOWER Robert L. Crawford

Much has been written about the lethal effects of tall communication towers on migrating birds. These towers are often a valuable source of study specimens and provide information on the migration habits of birds.

Such a study was conducted at the WCTV tower on Tall Timbers Research Station, in northern Leon County, Florida, from 1955 through 1966. In the bulletins on this study, Stoddard (Tall Timbers Research Station, Bulletin No. 1, 1962) and later Stoddard and Norris (Tall Timbers Research Station, Bulletin No. 8, 1967) discussed predation on the casualties. They found that predators frequently destroyed or ruined many of the stricken birds before they could be picked up and they consequently attempted by various methods to control this predation. The measures taken against the most troublesome predators are described fully in the two bulletins. Control measures were stopped upon completion of the study.

By fall migration of 1971, five years had elapsed without predator control near the tower, allowing time for predators to repopulate the area. Thus, it seemed an ideal time to determine by a controlled experiment the amount of predation on tower-killed birds.

On each of five nights between 21 October and 27 October 1971 I set out dead birds on the WCTV tower grounds in a rough circle 200-250 yards in diameter with the tower as its center. Since the tower grounds are checked each morning, it was necessary to avoid confusing the test birds with freshly killed ones. Therefore, each test bird was marked with a small wire stake nearby. The birds were set out each night after dark between 1930 and 2015 EDST. They were checked the next morning at first light (usually around 0715) and again at 0900. The test birds were mostly Passeriformes and nearly every family in that order was represented. Also, one Barred Owl (Strix varia), one Yellow-billed Cuckoo (Coccyzus americanus) and one Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (Sphyrapicus varius) were used.

Table I gives the results of the study. For these figures predation was considered to have taken place not only when the bird was partially or completely gone, but, in addition, when the bird was felt to have been ruined for a specimen.

	Table 1. Predation	Table 1. Predation on Test Birds Set Out At WCTV Tower in October, 1971.	At WCTV Tower in O	ctober, 1971.	
Night of	No. of Birds set out	No. gone or ruined by daybreak	No. gone or ruined between 0715 and 0900	Total gone or ruined	No. Left undisturbed
21-22 October	17	11 (64%)	4 (24%)	15 (88%)	2 (12%)
23-24 October	20	14 (70%)	5 (25%)	19 (95%)	1 (5%)
24-25 October	20	18 (90%)	1 (5%)	19 (95%)	1 (5%)
25-26 October	40	28 (70%)	6 (15%)	34 (85%)	6 (15%)
27-28 October	09	(0001) 09	0	60 (100%)	0
Total	157	131 (83%)	16 (10%)	147 (93%)	10 (7%)

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As the table shows, predation was considerable. Total predation, day and night, was 93% (147 of 157 birds). Only ten (7%) were undisturbed by 0900 the morning after they were set out. One hundred and thirty-one (83%) were gone or destroyed by daylight. Sixteen (10%) were gone or destroyed between 0715 and 0900.

Apparently, Great Horned Owls (Bubo virginianus) were the primary nocturnal predators, while Common and Fish Crows (Corvus brachyrhynchos and C. ossifragus) accounted for the morning losses.

The gradual increase in the precentage of predation on the test birds is probably a result of a tapering off of the number of birds hitting the tower. On the two mornings prior to the start of the study, 151 and 41 birds were picked up. This was the heaviest kill wave of the fall. On the first morning of the study, 25 birds were picked up. The next two mornings no birds were were picked up and the percentage of predation rose from 88% to 95%. On the fourth night the number of test birds was doubled to 40 and four additional birds were found the next morning, indicating that more had hit the tower that night than had the two nights previous. The percentage of predation dropped back to 85%. On the final night, 60 birds were set out and the number found the next morning dropped to three. The percentage of predation for the test birds showed a corresponding increase to 100%. The large kills had probably attracted more predators into the area than usual and when the number of tower kills began to drop the test birds were taken a much higher rate.

The situation here and the results obtained are certainly not universal in application and are not meant to be taken as such. The results do show, however, that those considering doing a tower study should take the matter of predation seriously. Only by strict predator control and early morning checking can meaningful data be obtained. Potential students should also consider whether their data would be worth the drastic measures that predator control often entails.

I would like to thank W. Wilson Baker and Don L. Harris for their help and advice.

Tall Timbers Research Station, Route 1, Box 160, Tallahassee, Florida 32303.

GENERAL NOTES

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BLUE GOOSE IN SCREVEN CO., GA.—In Georgia the Blue Goose (Chen caerulescens) is regarded as a rare fall transient and winter resident. (Burleigh, T. D. 1958. Georgia Birds, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Okla.). Its occurance in the state is therefore always of interest.

One day in early November, 1970, Mr. and Mrs. Hermann Hagan saw a Blue Goose in typical adult plumage come down into their pond. Its identificication was confirmed on November 27 by Julius Arail. It. remained there with the thirty domestic geese owned by Mr. and Mrs. Hagan. Early in December Mrs. Hagan heard the Blue Goose honking and listened while a second Blue Goose answered and flew down to join it. The two kept constant company with the domestic geese, eating dry grain with them, and nibbling in green rye in a nearby field. During the first week in January, 1971, a third goose of this species appeared, and the three, all in fine adult plumage, were seen daily with the domestic geese.

The Hagan farm is ten miles east of Sylvania and three miles west of the Savannah River in Screven County. On January 8, 1971, when Grace Boddiford and Anne Hamilton visited the farm, the three geese were still present. As far as we know, this is the first occurence of this species in Screven County.

Ellin R. Hagan, Route 2, Box 94-A, Sylvania, Ga. 30467.

A WINTERING BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER IN CALLAWAY MEMORIAL FOREST—On the unlikely date of December 2, 1970, a hand—some Black-throated Blue Warbler (Dendroica caerulescens) appeared at the backyard feeders of the B. F. Ridings, Jr., where it was observed frequently through following days till February 3rd. It fed on a rendered suet mixture several times daily. A favored habitat of mountain laurel (Kalmia latifolia) complete with stream and slopes is close by.

The residence is inside an entrance to the recently established Cason J. Callaway Memorial Forest at a south foot of Pine Mountain. In Harris County, it is about 20 miles air-line north of Columbus.

L. A. Wells, 322 Cascade Rd., Columbus, Ga. 31904.

EARLY SPRING RECORD OF LESSER YELLOWLEGS IN ATLANTA— On February 28, 1971, I saw a Lesser Yellowleg (*Totanus flavipes*) bobbing characteristically in the shallows at the west end of a pond on Panthersville

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Louis C. Fink, 620 Peachtree Street N. W., Atlanta, Ga. 30308.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE AND COMMON GOLDENEYE ON LAKE LANIER-On Thursday afternoon March 11, 1971, about 3:30 P. M., I was birding by boat on Lake Lanier, Forsyth County, Georgia. I spotted a small raft of ducks and put my boat ashore at a spot about one hundred yards from the birds, where I had the sun behind me. Through a thirty power scope I observed that the raft consisted of 7 female and 7 male Common Goldeneye (Bucephala clangula). The sun was very bright and the heads of the males sparkled a bright green. The redish brown heads of the females were also very plain in the bright light. While counting the birds I noticed that there were fifteen and that one of the birds was different. After careful study I realized that the fifteenth bird was a male Barrow's Goldeneve (Glaucionetta islandica). Its head was noticeably larger and dark with a slight purplish hue. The "crescent" in front of its eye was visable and the sides were noticeably darker than the male Common Goldeneve, but not so dark as the females.

This seems to be the first sight record of Barrow's Goldeneye for Georgia and probably the southeast. The fact that this individual was so far south of its usual winter range may have something to do with the winter of 1970-71 being an "invasion year" in Forsyth County for Common Goldeneve.

Common Goldeneye have been sighted by me in Forsyth County this winter on the following dates: November 28, 1970, (10 birds), January 21, 1971, (3 birds), January 30, 1971, (2 birds), January 31, (2), February 3, (2), February 6, (1), February 21, (1), March 11, (Appx. 35).

Before the winter of 1970-71 I had only two Forsyth County sightings of Common Goldeneye: a male on March 9, 1968, (Oriole XXXIV, 80) and a female January 26, 1970, on Lake Lanier. This would be one sighting for the winter of 1967-68, none for winter 1968-69, one for winter 1969-70, but for the winter of 1970-71, eight sightings with a total of approximately 56 individuals.

John M. Paget, 525 Pilgrim Mill Rd., Route 8, Cumming, Georgia 30130.

WINTER RECORD OF DOWITCHERS IN ATLANTA-On March 14, 1971. at ten A.M., T. McRae Williams and the writer found 48 Dowitchers (Limnodromus sp.) on the grounds of the Georgia Regional Hospital on Panthersville Road in Southeast DeKalb County. According to Burleigh (1958, Georgia Birds, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma), there are only six records for the interior of the state. In 1932 and again in 1939, this bird was found in Atlanta, both years in August. In July of 1970, several members of the Atlanta Bird Club saw Dowitchers in the Panthersville Road area.

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Mr. Williams and I first saw two birds fly up suddenly from the creek on the hospital grounds. We were attracted to their snipe-like bills and the conspicuous white rump. The two birds flew to a grassy area thoroughly saturated from previous rains. There, they were joined by three others; they flew up to meet others until a flock of eleven was circling. At the same time, a flock of 37 more appeared and circled in a tight, compact flock, eventually disappearing over a slight rise. Ten minutes later, one dowitcher rose from the pond about half a mile away.

We did not see the birds feeding except at a distance in grass which obscurbed their bills. Based on probabilities, we assume these were griseus Interior (or Short-billed) Dowitchers. The writer has studied both Dowitchers in the past, and these compared with griseus.

Louis C. Fink, Apt. 913, 620 Peachtree Street N.E., Atlanta, Ga. 30308.

FIRST RECORD OF THE WILLET IN THE INTERIOR OF THE STATE-On Sunday, April 25, 1971, the 243rd species was added to the all-time Atlanta list when Byron Perry and I saw a Willet (Catoptrophorus semipalmatus) in the lake on Panthersville Road in south DeKalb County. The time was 11 A. M. on a clear day, following by 48 hours a storm of tornadic proportions which had passed through the area. The clock-wise winds surrounding such storms may well have brought the willet from the Gulf Coast, where it is common.

The Eastern race (C. s. semipalmatus) is a common summer resident on the coast of Georgia, but I find no records for the interior of the State. The Western race (C. s. inornatus) winters on the Georgia coast, so it seems there must have been an east-west or west-east migration of these birds for many

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TRAILL'S FLYCATCHER NESTING IN NORTHEAST GEORGIA- In the last few years the range of the Traill's Flycatcher (Empidonax trailii) has been extended considerably southward from the range given in the Check-List of North American Birds, Fifth Edition (1957). After checking many

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likely looking habitats for this flycatcher in northeast Georgia, on 13 June 1971 I heard the characteristic two-syllable note of this bird in the Dillard Valley one-fourth of a mile north of U. S. Highway 441. Every few days the spot was checked and the birds found there. On 8 July a nest with three eggs was found about five feet up in an alder (Alnus serrulata) growing on the steep bank of a small irrigation ditch only a few yards from the Little Tennessee River. Beside the alders there were a few scattered clumps of elder (Sambucus canadensis) and willow (Salix caroliniana). There was a field of corn on one side of the ditch, and on the other a weedy field that was mowed while nesting was in progress. Two tiny young were in the nest on 24 July and left the nest the first week in August. Hiding in tall weeds nearby, we observed the female at her nest duties. The male would remain in the vicinity uttering "quit" notes. The song to my ears sounded like "wheat-ear", with a somewhat rasping quality, and though not very loud still had a fair carrying power.

Apparently not all Traill's Flycatchers build nests of white cottony plant materials. This nest had no cottony plant materials, but was made of loose grass blades with a thin lining of horse hair. Total outside height of the nest was seven inches, including the loose pieces hanging below the nest proper.

Checking another likely looking habitat for this flycatcher, another pair was found 1.2 miles north of the first pair near the plant of Burlington Industries. Here in a marshy meadow of wild roses (Rosa carolinana) and swamp milkweed (Asclepias incarnatai) with scattered clumps of alder, alternate-leaved dogwood (Cornus alternifolia), and wild crab (Pyrus angustifolius), the male Traill's Flycatcher used a wild cherry (Prunus sp.) for its favorite perch, this being the tallest tree in the area. A nest made of white cottony material, but empty, was found by Louis Schweizer on 5 July. This nest was possibly that of the Traill's Flycatcher. The first locality mentioned with the nesting activity was believed, because of the late date, to be a second or renesting attempt.

Mr. and Mrs. W. L. Gibbs, Mrs. Caroline G. Newhall, and Mrs. E. O. Mellinger were other interested observers of the two flycatcher localities in Rabun County.

E. O. Mellinger, Route 1, Tiger, Georgia. 30576.

RECENT LITERATURE

WATER AND MARSH BIRDS OF THE WORLD, by Oliver L. Austin, Jr., illustrated by Arthur Singer, edited by Herbert S. Zim., Golden Press, Inc., New York, N. Y. 223 pages, 200 species illustrated in full color, index, \$2.45.

This is a paperback reprint (5½ x 8 inches) from the authors' monumental "Birds of the World". It includes information on the 980 species of water, shore, and marsh birds of 49 families and ten orders; the illustrations of 200 species are beautifully reproduced.

BIRDS OF THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, paintings by Keith Shackleton, text by Ted Stokes, foreword by H. R. H. The Prince Philip. Country Life Books, Hamlyn House, Feltham, Middlesex, England. 156 pages, 15 oil paintings, 23 plates in gouache of groups of sea birds, distribution maps in black and white, index. Price not given.

This is an oversized book, 9½ x 11¾ inches, and a delight to the eye. Comparatively few of the penguins, skuas, shoemakers, cahows, and other birds of the ocean are familiar to Georgia ornithologists, but the book is an encyclopedia reference work. As the artist notes, many of these oceanic birds are black and white, with little differences between the sexes. However, immature and adult birds differ vastly, and the pictures concentrate on the differences to be seen at close range. Artist and author are both in love with their subjects, and communicate this feeling to the reader. Commander Ted Stokes says that he does not remember a time when he could not instantly recognize every British bird!

BIRDS BIRDS, Hamlyn House, Feltham, Middlesex, England. 152 pages, 200 photographs, including 24 in full color. Price not given.

This is a collection of essays by Guy Mountfort, Bruce Campbell, D. H. S. Risdon, and others, ranging from "Bird Behavior" to "Bird Watching" and "Birds in Zoos". The writing is naturally from the British point of view, but there is considerable attention paid to American birds. The beginning bird student will profit from the discussion of migration, feeding, care of young—and the tips of bird identification. The photos vary in quality, but the color photographs are very well done.

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