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SOME OLD RECORDS OF TV TOWER KILLS FROM SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

Robert L. Crawford

INTRODUCTION

In September 1955, Herbert L. Stoddard, Sr., initiated a study of nocturnal migrants killed at the WCTV transmitting tower in northern Leon County, Florida. Joined in the 1960's by Robert A. Norris, Stoddard continued the project until 1967 and since then the study has been carried on by other workers at Tall Timbers Research Station (Stoddard, 1962; Stoddard and Norris, 1967; Crawford, 1974a).

As part of their work at the WCTV tower, Stoddard and Norris visited nearby towers to obtain comparative data. The most frequently visited of these was the WALB tower near Doerun in Colquitt County, Georgia, where on more than twenty-five nights between the falls of 1959 and 1963 they recorded kills of varying magnitude. Two kills were also recorded from the WRBL-WTVM tower near Cusseta in Chattahoochee County. These kills have never been reported and as such data are lacking from southwest Georgia (*cf.* Johnston 1955, 1957) an analysis of them is presented here.

METHODS AND RESULTS

The WALB tower is about 5 km east of Doerun in northern Colquitt County (about 76 km N and 31 km E of the WCTV tower). It is physically similar to the WCTV tower: i.e., triangular, about 305 m high, and lighted by red blinker lights. However, it has only 18 guywires, whereas the WCTV tower has 21. The Doerun tower was checked three times between 13 September and 23 October 1959, once in October 1961, fifteen times between 8 September and 21 December 1962, three times between 16 March and 23 April 1963, and six times between 14 September and 28 October 1963. David W. Johnston, Willie Lurry, Leon Neel, and H. L. Stoddard, Jr., accompanied Stoddard and Norris on some of the searches. A total of 613 birds was recorded and some evidence of kills was found on all but a few of the visits. However, many of the birds found were mummified or the remains of predator activity and thus could not be certainly assigned to a specific night. Another problem was

that the field surrounding the WALB tower was sometimes in high, dense weeds, whereas the WCTV grounds were kept in closely cut grass. Also, there was none of the intensive predator control at the Doerun tower that was conducted at the WCTV site. Stoddard's and Norris' notes dwell on these points at some length, e.g., Stoddard on 15 October 1961: "... now practically impossible to find birds over 90% at least of the ground ..." and "... these areas [are so] smothered in thick grass and high weeds that a person could scarcely expect to find 1% of the dead birds. The condition of the grounds hopeless ..."; Stoddard on 23 October 1959: "Plenty of new sign where predators had eaten birds—especially in weeds. Cat, dog, coon, and polecat tracks all over plowed area and through weeds"; Norris on 8 November 1962: "Two dogs and 3 hogs were seen on the area." Thus it was often difficult to find birds at the Doerun site on mornings after a large kill had occurred at the WCTV tower. Three nights, though, present themselves for comparison (the dates given are the *mornings* on which the birds were picked up): 13 September 1959, 8 September 1962, and 18 October 1962 (Table 1). The kill of 8 September 1962 was recorded in the notes and on one specimen preserved (Crawford, 1974b) as being 7 September. However, in the same notes, references are made to kills at the WCTV tower that occurred that same night and the night before and these are listed in the WCTV notes as being the 7th and 8th rather than the 6th and 7th. It appears, then, that the notation in the Doerun notes was an error and that 8 September 1962 is the correct date for this kill.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

In the fall large kills at towers are usually associated with the passage of a cold front. If some time has elapsed since the last front, the appearance of another one will initiate a large flight southward (Able, 1973). Often these same fronts cause unsettled, stormy weather, the low ceilings and poor visibility of which create the conditions usually found at large kills. The low ceiling forces the birds to fly at lower altitudes than normal (thus concentrating more birds within the range of the tower), and the poor visibility due to the frequent occurrence of rain or mist often causes severe disorientation around the lights of a tower (Herbert, 1970). In the following discussion, Daily Weather Maps and Local Climatological Data sheets (for Tallahassee, Florida) published by the U.S. Department of Commerce are used.

The night of 12-13 September 1959:

The weather maps show a cold front that passed through Atlanta, Georgia, on the 11th and through Tallahassee on the 12th. This was the first major front of the season and the first to reach Tallahassee before breaking up. Passing through the Atlanta area on the 11th, it initiated the large flight of migrants that reached the Doerun-Tallahassee area on the night of the 12-13th. On that night winds blew from NE—ENE; the

Table 1. Numbers and species killed at the WCTV tower in Leon County, Florida and at the WALB tower in Colquitt County, Georgia.

Species	12-13 Sept. 1959		7-8 Sept. 1962		17-18 Oct. 1962	
	WCTV	WALB	WCTV	WALB	WCTV	WALB
Green Heron <i>Butorides virescens</i>	1	0	0	0	0	0
Sora <i>Porzana carolina</i>	0	0	0	2	0	0
Common Gallinule <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1	0	1	0	0	0
American Coot <i>Fulica americana</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0
Yellow-billed Cuckoo <i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	1	0	0	0	1	0
Common Nighthawk <i>Chordeiles minor</i>	1	0	2	0	0	0
Belted Kingfisher <i>Megasceryle alcyon</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0
Great Crested Flycatcher <i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>	0	0	0	1	0	0
Acadian Flycatcher <i>Empidonax virescens</i>	1	1	1	0	0	0
Gray Catbird <i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	1	0	0	0	2	0
Wood Thrush <i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1
Swainson's Thrush <i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0
Veery <i>Catharus fuscescens</i>	62	3	21	67	0	0
Ruby-crowned Kinglet <i>Regulus calendula</i>	0	0	0	0	3	0
White-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo griseus</i>	4	0	0	0	0	1
Yellow-throated Vireo <i>Vireo flavifrons</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0
Red-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	91	100	65	105	0	1
Black-and-white Warbler <i>Mniotilta varia</i>	1	0	2	3	0	0
Prothonotary Warbler <i>Protonotaria citrea</i>	1	1	7	7	0	0
Golden-winged Warbler <i>Vermivora chrysoptera</i>	0	0	1	1	0	0
Tennessee Warbler <i>Vermivora peregrina</i>	0	0	0	0	12	2
Northern Parula <i>Parula americana</i>	4	0	0	0	0	0
Yellow Warbler <i>Dendroica petechia</i>	0	0	0	2	0	0
Magnolia Warbler <i>Dendroica magnolia</i>	0	0	0	0	6	2
Black-throated Blue Warbler <i>Dendroica caerulescens</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0
Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Dendroica coronata</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1
Black-throated Green Warbler <i>Dendroica virens</i>	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cerulean Warbler <i>Dendroica cerulea</i>	0	0	3	4	0	0
Blackburnian Warbler <i>Dendroica fusca</i>	1	0	1	1	0	0
Chestnut-sided Warbler <i>Dendroica pensylvanica</i>	1	0	0	0	0	0
Bay-breasted Warbler <i>Dendroica castanea</i>	0	0	0	0	17	4
Pine Warbler <i>Dendroica pinus</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1
Palm Warbler <i>Dendroica palmarum</i>	0	0	0	0	6	6
Ovenbird <i>Seiurus aurocapillus</i>	1	2	1	10	2	0
Northern Waterthrush <i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i>	5	3	2	5	0	0
Kentucky Warbler <i>Oporornis formosus</i>	2	0	3	5	0	0
Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	1	0	2	1	0	0
Yellow-breasted Chat <i>Icteria virens</i>	0	0	0	3	0	0
Hooded Warbler <i>Wilsonia citrina</i>	15	1	5	1	0	0
American Redstart <i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	0	0	1	3	0	0
Bobolink <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	15	1	3	3	0	0
Red-winged Blackbird <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	0	0	0	0	2	1
Northern Oriole <i>Icterus galbula</i>	0	0	0	3	0	0
Summer Tanager <i>Piranga rubra</i>	0	0	0	1	0	0
Indigo Bunting <i>Passerina cyanea</i>	0	0	0	0	2	1
Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0
Field Sparrow <i>Spizella pusilla</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1

sky was 100% overcast; visibility averaged 11.6 km; and the ceiling was quite low (260 m). A light rain fell throughout the night (0.5 cm). Radar studies have shown that in the SE United States migrants consistently fly downwind regardless of direction (see Able, 1974, for a review) and this is borne out by the position of the birds on the ground the next morning. Stoddard carefully mapped the location of each bird at the WCTV tower and made notations at the Doerun site. On this nite, with predominantly NE winds, the birds were found in the SW sector of the grounds.

The night of 7-8 September 1962:

The front that caused this flight and kill passed Atlanta on the 6th and Tallahassee on the 8th. On the night of the 7th-8th the sky was completely overcast (except for one reading at 05:00), and early in the night the ceiling was fairly high (2100-2400 m) with NNW-NNE winds. Later, at 23:00, the ceiling dropped sharply (to 180 m and lower) and the winds calmed and then shifted to E-ESE. At 04:00, the winds changed again, to ENE. Thus the kills probably occurred between 24:00 and 03:00, for at the WCTV tower the birds were found in the NW sector of the grounds. At Doerun Stoddard noted that they "lay to the west." Some light rain fell that night (recorded as a trace).

The night of 17-18 October 1962:

In comparison with the other two nights, the weather conditions were not quite so severe and the smaller kills reflect this. The weather maps show that by the 18th, the front had already passed Atlanta and was over Tallahassee. Until 23:00 the sky was clear, the ceiling unlimited, visibility 16 km, and the winds NW-N. After 23:00 it began to grow cloudy, and between 01:00 and 03:00 it became completely overcast and the winds shifted to N. The ceiling remained unlimited and visibility was still good. No rain was recorded. The next day, Stoddard mapped the kill at the WCTV tower as lying due S of the tower and Norris found similar conditions at Doerun. Thus the kills probably occurred after the overcast conditions appeared and the winds shifted to N.

SPECIES COMPOSITION

To investigate the similarity of species composition between the kills at the two towers on each of the three nights, the *G*-test for independence (Sokal and Rohlf, 1969, p. 599) was calculated for each set of data in Table 1. Two pairs of kills were found to be significantly similar: 13 September 1959, $G=95.84$ ($P<.005$), 8 September 1962, $G=44.04$ ($P<.01$), but those from the night of 17-18 October were not: $G=27.32$ ($P>.05$). Perhaps this variance was the result of a temporal difference in weather conditions at the two towers. It does seem that factors which caused certain species to be killed at the WCTV tower were the same at the WALB tower and that both were sampling essentially the same flights on at least two of the three nights.

MIGRATION RECORDS

Only two of the hundreds of birds found at the Doerun tower (and none of the 78 handled at Cusseta) have been reported: a "Lawrence's Warbler" (*Vermivora chrysoptera* X *V. pinus*) on 7 [=8] September 1962 and a Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*) on 8 November 1962 (Crawford, 1974b). In the annotated list below are discussed records of interest from the Doerun tower and in this list (as well as in Table 1) common and scientific names follow the A. O. U. Checklist (1957) and its thirty-second supplement (A. O. U. 1973).

Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

One immature was found on 4 October 1962. This is a late date for this species which is uncommon in southwest Georgia.

Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*)

One was found on 2 October 1962. Not often detected away from coastal areas, this and the following species are probably more common both in migration and winter than published reports indicate. This date is also fairly early, though Stoddard found one on 28 August 1946 in Grady County (Burleigh, 1958, pp. 218-219).

Sora (*Porzana carolina*)

Burleigh (1958, p. 220) listed only three fall records of Soras from SW Georgia (the earliest being 19 September 1949), and Wells (1973) and Hopkins (1973) noted only one each from the Columbus and Fitzgerald areas, respectively. Found at the Doerun tower were 2 on 8 September 1962, 1 on 16 September, 2 on 21 September, and 1 on 23 September 1963.

Long-billed Marsh Wren (*Telmatodytes palustris*)

One on 25 September 1962 is an early date for this species for which fall records are scarce in SW Georgia.

Short-billed Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*)

One on 2 October 1962 was early.

Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*)

One on 28 October 1963 equals what is probably the latest date for Georgia (Burleigh, 1958, p. 566; Crawford and Dozier, 1973).

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

Burleigh (1958, p. 575) commented on the difficulty of detecting Bobolinks in the fall and local lists from SW Georgia reflect this well. Crawford and Dozier (1973) listed no fall records, Hopkins (1973) called them "absent in the fall," and Wells (1973) noted them as "unrecorded in fall." Stoddard's manuscript *The Birds of Grady County, Georgia* referred to the Bobolink as "a rare fall migrant" and noted two records of single birds: 24 September 1924 and 12 September 1959. The latter bird was seen on the same day that 14 were picked up at the nearby WC-TV tower. Bobolinks are not at all uncommon in the fall at the WCTV tower, and therefore the following records from the Doerun tower are not surprising: 1 on 13 September 1959, 3 on 8 September and 1 on 2 October 1962, 1 on 15 September, 1 on 16 September, 1 on 21 September, and 2 on 23 September 1963.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)

One on 28 October 1963 is a fairly late date for this species.

Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*)

Two were found on 2 October 1962, 1 on 4 October 1962, and 1 on 23 October 1959. The 2 October date is early for this species.

Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*)

One was found on 8 November 1962. This is another species which is seldom recorded in its fall migration through SW Georgia.

Two other records of interest from the Doerun tower concern relatively common species that are not often found in tower kills: a Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*) on 16 October 1959 and a Belted Kingfisher (*Megasceryle alcyon*) on 13 September 1959.

THE CUSSETA TOWER RECORDS

Only two kills were recorded at this tower: 60 on 18 October 1962 and 18 on 23 April 1962. The October kill provided some records of in-

terest, but most of the birds found were mummies that could have been there for up to two weeks according to estimates made by Stoddard in his notes. Thus the records of 4 Veeries (*Catharus fuscescens*), 1 Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*), and 1 Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*), all of which are late on this date must be disregarded. It might be noted that the remains of 5 Bobolinks were also found.

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BACHMAN'S SPARROW: SONGS AND BEHAVIOR

George Andrew Dorsey

The Bachman's Sparrow (*Aimophila aestivalis*) seems to have become a scarce bird in recent times (American Birds, 1971 to 1975). I believe it might be of some interest to offer some notes on its general habits, exclusive of nesting activities. Although a good deal has been written about this bird, I believe I have some additional information that may be presented.

In the more northern part of its range it may be expected that this bird would be found in locations which would be quite poor for the presence of most other species of birds, for its most favored habitat in the Piedmont area was in worn-out and abandoned farm lands where no cultivation had been in progress for several years, and it was most often found on open hillsides, with a good covering of broom-straw grass (*Andropogon*) together with other low, dense, weedy plant growth, with a few scattered bush-sized young trees. This kind of setting seems to have become less common in recent years, and this may be an important cause of the bird's decline in numbers. Most of the information given here has come from observations made quite a number of years ago, 1927 to 1945, when this bird could be found much more frequently than it may be now.

While the Bachman's Sparrow is on the ground and not in song, it is usually one of our most elusive birds. Down in the grass it runs along the ground in an uneven course around and among the clumps of vegetation, hiding so cleverly that it is hardly possible to follow its line of motion. When the bird is singing it assumes a completely different mode of behavior, as though it were so preoccupied with the song that it loses a good deal of caution. It may be quite easily frightened, however, and will cease singing to drop into the grass and hide. But if the observer is alone and on foot, and if he moves slowly and quietly, the bird may sometimes be approached quite closely. On two occasions, when a Bachman's Sparrow was singing from a low perch in a bush, by means of walking very slowly and steadily, I have been able to stalk it close enough so that I stood less than three feet from the bird, and I could look down its throat as it opened its bill to sing. The lining of the mouth was a yellowish-pink, and I thought at the same time that it was as if it were lined with gold, although the song might be called silvery in tone quality.

When a bird is quietly approached while it is on the ground, it may appear to be suspicious and uncertain. It has an excited manner of lifting its crown feathers, and raising and lowering its head in quick, nervous jerks, watching the observer warily. Yet by using care it may sometimes be approached rather closely. However, with any extra amount of movement or sound from the observer, it will fly away into

the grass, where it is quickly lost to view. If the bird is disturbed while it is perching in a bush, but not singing, before it becomes alarmed enough to leave the perch it may sit in the branches and utter a repeated sharp note: "tseep!"—somewhat lisping in tone quality, and just a bit like the steely alarm note of the Cardinal. This note may vary, and at times it may sound like: "tcheet!" and sometimes "tseet!" It will flip its tail in quick, short thrusts: down-up, pause, down-up, pause . . . The tail is held at a moderately upward-slanting angle, and the wing tips are held somewhat low, a bit below the tail coverts. If the bird is not too disturbed by the observer's quiet presence, occasionally it may lose its suspicion enough to resume singing after a while, but more often its alarm grows until it leaves the perch, and I have seen it do this with a burst of the peculiar twittering which I shall attempt to describe farther on in this report.

In addition to call notes the Bachman's Sparrow has two distinct types of vocalizations that could be considered as song performances. One of these I shall term as the *regular* song, and this is the one that is typically described in most of the written accounts of the bird, with the exception that some writers have given what I feel is a rather inadequate rendering in their descriptions. It is to be admitted that it is difficult to write satisfactory descriptions of bird songs on paper. Tape recordings are so much better that there is no question as to their superiority over written descriptions, but in former times when I made some of these observations, equipment for tape recording in the field had not been developed. Even so, I have yet to hear a commercially available recording that I can recommend as a good representation of the full character of the Bachman's Sparrow's song.

The vocal performance which I have called the regular song is one of the most beautiful sounds in nature. It is hardly fair to compare it to the song of the much-praised Hermit Thrush, for it is as though these two species were playing different instruments, and both songs are highly enjoyable to the bird observer whose ear is attuned to appreciation of bird songs as music. Listening to the Bachman's Sparrow does not need to be a scientific study by any means, for it may be regarded as an inspiring, aesthetic experience. Technical terms can only fall short in conveying any intimation of the enjoyment that may be gained from listening to the bird in its outdoor setting.

The regular song is a series of somewhat short song phrases, each usually consisting of a clear note followed by a tinkling trill, with a fair time-pause between the phrases. These usually vary in sequence, but any one phrase may sometimes be repeated two or three times. With some singers a particular phrase may not be repeated until a number of other phrases, each different in character, has been delivered, perhaps eight to ten or more. The beginning sound of a phrase is usually a single note,

clear and sweet in tone quality, but sometimes it may consist of a double note, and then it starts higher in pitch and is slurred downward to a lower pitch, or very rarely it may be slurred upward. This opening note is held for approximately a second or less in time duration, and it is immediately followed by the trill, which might sometimes be termed a "shake," and which is of about two seconds duration. This is usually a series of rapidly repeated notes, sometimes all on the same pitch, but more usually consisting of doubled notes with a quick-clinking effect. A trill may occasionally be a long, wavering note, or another trill may be of a series of down-slurred notes, slightly resembling one of the songs of the Cardinal, although more rapidly delivered. The trill is always at a different pitch from the opening note, which may start lower or higher than the trill. The song has great charm in its variety, its leisurely timing, and its clear, exalted sweetness.

Singing perches are in a bush or low tree. Sometimes a dead tree will be favored by an individual bird. Often a bird will habitually sing from a perch that is only about three feet high or less, if there are no larger bushes near the field that is its haunt. More often birds will be found with higher singing perches, however, perhaps fifteen or twenty feet up in a young tree. The bird perches upright, tail at a downward angle, raises its head a bit backward, opens its bill wide, and gives its clear notes, the lower mandible vibrating with the trill portion of the song.

Singing begins early in the spring; my earliest date for near Atlanta was March 7, but usually it was about the middle of March or a bit later before the first singing birds were heard. Quite often I have heard Bachman's Sparrows singing in the middle of the day when it was quite warm, but the song seems most frequently given in the earlier hours and late in the day. On one occasion, September 22, 1929, I observed a bird singing very softly, perhaps what could be called a whisper song.

The song that is given quite late in the day, in the quiet of the twilight time, seems to my ear to be sweeter and more plaintive in tone quality than the regular song of the bright daylight hours. Often the singer will not repeat any song phrase, as is done sometimes in the day, but will go on, leisurely, from phrase to phrase, with a varied, brilliant delivery that is one of the most pleasing sounds I have heard in all nature.

Robert Mengel (1951) gives an interesting account of what he calls a "flight-song" of the Bachman's Sparrow, but very little more than his one description seems to have been written about this particular vocal performance of the bird. This description given by Mengel is quite similar to the song, if it may be called such, that I have heard on a number of occasions. In my own notebooks I called it the "rising song" at first, but now I am not sure what to call it, since I do not regard it to be a true flight song. I am going to call it the *sporadic* song in this writing.

I have observed this vocal performance of the Bachman's Sparrow as being used most often as a form of prelude to the beginning of a period of singing. The bird usually began uttering the first notes of the sporadic song while it was on the ground, emerging from the thick grass, and immediately it began to move progressively to a series of higher perches, chirping and twittering as it went, until the singing perch was reached, and then the twittering of the sporadic song came to an end and, with no pause in between, it uttered the first clear phrase of the regular song, and then continued with that performance for an extended time. I have seen birds go through this routine at more than one location near College Park, Georgia, and in southern Cobb County, Georgia. On one occasion I stalked a silent bird, which flew away from me, going into hiding in dense broom-straw grass. Hoping to see it again, I tried whistling an imitation of its regular song. Immediately this bird began the twittering of the sporadic song which ended with a note of the regular song. At the same time the bird flew up to a perch in a low bush, where it sang for several minutes while I stood and watched it.

On another occasion a bird flew up into a small tree, while uttering the sporadic song and a single phrase of the regular song, but then it caught sight of me and, instead of singing, it scolded me with a single note for about three minutes. Then it uttered the sporadic song and flew back into the grass. At another time a bird was in a low tree, not singing, and on my approach it uttered the sporadic song, and then flew down into the grass with no other vocal utterance.

This sporadic song is a vibrant, rich and varied series of rapidly uttered chirping notes, scattered in pitch, somewhat harsh, yet not at all unmusical. It is deep and jubilant in quality, boisterous and ecstatic, and it sounds as if the birds were excited. It does not resemble the regular song in any way other than being a vocal utterance.

I am not trying to explain this sporadic twittering. Before a satisfactory interpretation might be made of it, I should like to study it more, since I have heard it a relatively few times. But I have not been able to find the bird in any recent years.

The last time I found a bird of this species in Floyd County, Georgia, was on April 18, 1954, and it had never seemed to be common in this area. Most of my past observations were made at a previous time in the Piedmont section, near Atlanta, where habitat conditions seemed more favorable for it. A good deal of cattle-raising has been developed in Floyd County in recent years, and the Bachman's Sparrow would not be found where livestock trample the ground to keep the vegetation cropped short. In the broom-straw type of habitat it would be difficult to see it in the winter, but I do have one winter record for it, January 14, 1928, south of College Park, Georgia.

What factors could have caused the Bachman's Sparrow to decline in numbers? Perhaps no one really knows. Pesticides may have played a part, but a changing of the habitat seems more likely. There seems to have been a decrease in farming methods that would be likely to produce abandoned, worn-out, hillside lands, and people have become more careful not to let fire burn over the countryside. A burning over of the hillsides may have reduced the bush growth, and have renewed the chance for the growth of broomstraw grass. It could possibly be that with the declining number of hawks, rats and mice may have increased in numbers, and these in turn may have broken up more of the nests of ground-nesting birds. We may speculate, but there seems to be small doubt from the general evidence that this desirable little bird is disappearing from much of its former northern range.

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GENERAL NOTES

SONG SPARROW NESTING AT ROME, GEORGIA—Although the Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) has nested in the vicinity of Rome, Floyd County, Georgia, for more than 20 years, its breeding here apparently has not been previously reported. I have not made an extensive effort to locate nests, but I do have some random finds which may be reported as an addition to the recorded information about its breeding range in Georgia. As has been noted (Burleigh, 1958. *Georgia Birds*, Univ. of Okla. Press, Norman, Okla., pp. 690-691), this species seems originally to have been present in Georgia only as a winter resident, but in more recent times it had gradually extended its breeding range southward into this state. This should already be well-known, but we need data on various localities for the bird.

My data for the vicinity of Rome are:

June 6, 1949. One bird in full song. No nest found.

April 30, 1953. Nest with five small young. In low, thicket privet bush (*Ligustrum vulgare*) at edge of recently abandoned pasture. Nest a bit over two meters above ground, well-concealed under leaves near the top of the bush. Both parent birds came to the nest; one sang, one carried insect food to the young. Nest observed almost daily; the young left the nest on May 7.

May 18, 1953. Nest with young birds. Built into the ground on a weedy ledge on a roadside bank. Discovered May 15 by W.A. DuPre, Sr., and shown to me today, which was the day when the young left the nest.

June 17, 1971. Nest with one egg and two newly hatched young. In cultivated Japanese holly (*Ilex crenata*) at side of brick building. June 20, three young birds. On June 21 these were eaten by a black rat snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*). On June 22 an adult was seen at this empty nest.

June 19 1973. Nest with three young birds. One adult sang, one fed insects to the young. In close-cropped cultivated Burford holly (*Ilex cornuta*, var. *burfordi*) at corner of brick building, concealed in the top of the bush, and a bit more than one meter above the ground. Young in the nest June 20 and June 21. On June 25 the young had left the nest, which now contained one infertile egg (apparently not a Cowbird egg) buried down into the lining of the nest. Parent birds nearby, male singing.

July 5, 1973. Another nest, on opposite side of the same building of June 19. This nest also in a clipped Burford holly, and a bit more than one meter above ground. It contained four eggs, and the female incubated through July 16. On July 24 the nest was in disarray, and contained fragments of egg shells; probably the work of a predator.

June 7, 1974. Nest in cultivated Chinese holly (*Ilex cornuta*) at corner of brick school chapel. Four eggs June 7 and 8. Not examined on

June 9. June 10, eggs had hatched into four young birds. On June 19 they left the nest in fright when a yard maintenance man clipped the shrub.

July 2, 1974. Nest at corner of brick building, in close-clipped Japanese holly, well-concealed beneath top of shrub, about 8 decimeters above ground. July 2 and 3, three eggs. July 8, two newly-hatched young and one egg.

June 24, 1975. Nest at side of entrance of brick building, in clipped Burford holly, just beneath rounded crest of shrub, about 14 decimeters above ground. Four eggs, female on nest, male in song. June 25, June 27, four eggs, female incubating. June 30, four young birds. July 1, July 3, July 8, female brooding young, male singing. July 9, nest empty, tipped to one side, appearing to have been visited by a predator.

August 8, 1975. Nest with three eggs discovered; in Burford holly, close-trimmed and dense, at corner of the same brick building of June 24. Probable second brood. Nest close to one meter above ground, and about nine decimeters below top of bush; in the rear part, well-concealed. Parent bird at the nest. August 10, one egg and two newly-hatched young at 8:00 A.M. (Eastern Standard Time). August 20, the young left the nest at what seemed to be an early time. Adults with them, scolding.

In summary: the Song Sparrow may now be considered to be a common breeding bird in the Rome area, and nesting activities are recorded here between the dates April 30 and August 20. Nests were located mainly in thick-grown cultivated shrubs, and were situated from ground level to a height of over two meters. Most nests contained three or four eggs or young, but one found on April 30 held five young.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. J. Fred Denton for his helpful suggestions for this report.

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FLOCKING ROSE-BREASTED AND BLUE GROSBEAKS—On October 12, 1973, I went to our farm on the west side of Whitfield County. The day was partly cloudy with the temperature in the low 70's.

Near the highest elevation of the farm—1,100 feet—in a dry, upland woods situation of Chestnut Oaks (*Quercus prinus*), Red Oaks (*Quercus* sp.), a sprinkling of hickories (*Carya* sp.), and an understory of

Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), I came upon eight - ten Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*). The birds were feeding together on the drupes of a dogwood tree and were in all states of plumage. Some were completely female plumaged, a few entirely changed to male attire, save for the striped head; others had a rose streak down the center of the breast; still others were entirely garbed in adult male plumage.

The next day, October 13, I went into the bottoms of the farm. My husband, Frank, was bush-hogging the meadow, so I crossed the East Chickamauga Creek onto the uncut side. Here I again saw eight - ten Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in all states of change, feeding on the seeds of the Giant Ragweed plants (*Ambrosia trifida*). I believe these to be the same birds seen the day before. Eventually, the birds flew off into a wooded area on an island in the creek.

Upon recrossing the creek, I looked up to the edge where the meadow meets the woods at the foot of the ridge, a tangly situation consisting of blackberries (*Rubus*, sp.), Sericea Lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneta*), Greenbriers (*Smilax rotundifolia*), Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) and saw four - five Blue Grosbeaks (*Guiraca caerulea*) in all states of change. One had blue wings and tail with a still brown body, a few were entirely brown, another had blue wings and tail and a blue streak down the center of the breast. One was completely blue with the chestnut wing bars of the adult male.

I felt this was a unique experience and a good opportunity to observe and study the different stages of plumage change in these birds. And, it is one of the delights—a bonus—that comes along every so often when in the field.

In telling Anne Hamilton about the sightings, she thought it most unusual to see that many Rose-breasted Grosbeaks together. Just recently, she drew my attention to an article written by Louis C. Fink (1968. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in Small Flock in Atlanta. *Oriole*, 33:35). He writes that his previous sightings were of single birds and quotes other sources to this effect and felt he was seeing a family group, consisting of six or so birds. Also, he found it unusual to see them near the ground and again quotes others sources in this regard.

I had no feeling of family with the flock I saw. Rather, I thought them to be traveling companions. I have seen on many occasions Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in loose groups in the tops of trees, as well as at eye level, around my home in Dalton and on our farm. I have never seen them in so tight a group; but it is not out of the ordinary for me to see them low to the ground.

Upon reflection, the Blue Grosbeaks could have been a locally raised family. I have found the nest of the Blue Grosbeak, with eggs and brooding female, on our farm. It is interesting to note that the nest had a good-sized piece of clear plastic worked into the side, after the fashion of a picture window!

Note: The day after I finished this article, on October 3, 1975, I went into the uncut bottoms of the farm along the East Chickamauga Creek. Almost the same scene was recreated, with one exception: there were more Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 15 - give or take a few - and, perhaps, only four Blue Grosbeaks, again in all states of change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank Anne Hamilton for the part she played in the writing of this article. I saw nothing unusual about the number of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks I originally saw or in their being low to the ground. Although in a tighter group than is usual—it was routine to me. Anne pointed out the unusualness of the number and gave me *The Oriole* containing Lou's article to read. Thank you, Anne!

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FIRST RECORD OF WHISTLING SWANS IN WHITFIELD COUNTY—In early February, 1975, Mrs. Emory (Bea) Grant mentioned that she and her husband had seen Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) and two swans on February 1, 1975, at their week-end home on Lake Kathy near Tunnel Hill. When asked whether the swans had orange or black bills and if they held their necks straight or curved, she replied the bills were black, necks erect; she thought them to be Whistling Swans (*Olor columbianus*).

The afternoon of February 13 my son, Robert, and I drove to Lake Kathy. At first we did not see the swans, then we spotted them on the far side on a grassy lawn at water's edge. Immediately, we drove around to the home and saw these were, indeed, Whistling Swans. The bills of the swans were smooth, with no knobbing. Upon our approach the swans, along with the Canada Geese, glided off into the water. The swans went to the opposite shore and started tipping up to feed. Again, we drove around and watched them for awhile.

After school on February 14, Robert and I with Sandy Pangle went back to see the swans and take pictures. The swans swam back and forth in the middle of the lake, affording us good views and photographic opportunities. On February 15, Norene Boring visited the lake, but the swans were not in evidence. Harry White observed the pair at the lake February 18.

Bea Grant mentioned the swans seemed to disappear on the week-ends when boating activity increased on the lake. One account said the swans had been at the lake about a month. Another person said they had been there since Christmas.

The plumage of the swans was a dirty gray. In a discussion with Ken and Lil Dubke about two Whistling Swans they had seen at Savannah Bay, Lake Chickamauga, Ooltewah, Tennessee, around the same dates, the point was brought out that the two swans at Tunnel Hill and one of the swans at Ooltewah were in dirty gray plumage. Teen-agers, no doubt!

The Georgia GOSHawk (Vol. II, No. 3) reports two (one source said four) immature Whistling Swans on December 12, 1974, on Lake Allison in the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge near Macon and one immature seen on Merry Ponds, Augusta, January 1, 1975. J. Fred Denton and Milton Hopkins, Jr., in *Pocket Check-list of Georgia Birds* (Georgia Ornithological Society) report them as rare in winter through-out the state, with recent records from Floyd, Fulton, Muscogee, Rockdale Counties. This question comes to mind: Could last year have been an invasive year or could these swans be extending their winter range down into Georgia from North Carolina? Burleigh (Thomas D. 1958 *Georgia Birds*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Okla.) states: Winters on the Atlantic Coast from Maryland to North Carolina and, rarely, south to Florida and the Gulf Coast . . .

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EARLY NESTING RECORD OF THE COMMON CROW AT DALTON—A quite early nesting record for the Common Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) was brought to my attention on February 17, 1975.

The children of Mrs. Bill (Darlene) Graves told their mother about two baby birds they had found on the ground, along with a partially destroyed nest, the afternoon of February 16. The next day, Darlene took the young birds to her friend, Mrs. Robert (Willie) Keowan, locally well-known for her expertise in the care and feeding of nestlings. Willie and Darlene wished to know the identity of their charges and contacted me.

I immediately went to Willie's home expecting to find, perhaps, young owls with such an early nesting date. Instead, I found two young well-feathered Common Crows and estimated their ages to be approximately two weeks. This would put the date of hatching about February 2. Despite good care, death came to the young Crows on February 21.

February 25 I called at the home of Darlene in the Rocky Face Estates Subdivision of Dalton to view the nest site. Darlene took me to the tree, a Virginia Pine (*Pinus virginiana*), where the nest had been built in a crotch, about 20 feet from the ground. Fragments of the nest were still hanging from the limbs. The nest-tree is at the back of a neighboring lot, fairly close to the house, and is quite bent and twisted. To my eyes, it did not seem to be a good location at all. A copse of mixed hardwoods, interspersed with Virginia and Loblolly Pines (*Pinus taeda*), formed a buffer zone in back of the tree, separating the two lots.

Burleigh (Thomas D. 1958. *Georgia Birds*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Okla.) lists the earliest nesting date as March 9, 1935, Atlanta - nest with five fresh eggs.

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BREEDING COLONY OF YELLOW-CROWNED HERONS IN TELFAIR COUNTY, GEORGIA—On 26 May 1975 Milton Hopkins III located a Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) breeding colony in an ox-bow lake of the Ocmulgee River. The location is on the north side of the river in Telfair County approximately five miles west northwest of the Ben Hill County boat landing in a creek about one half mile north of the present river bank.

He and I entered the breeding colony by boat on 30 May 1975. We counted twenty-six active nests, all containing young birds from one to three weeks of age. Some young were capable of flying short distances. Nest heights above water ranged from twenty to forty-five feet and averaged being thirty feet above the water. In nests where the young birds stood up high enough to be counted all contained four nestlings. Twenty-four nests were located in Tupelos (*Nyssa aquatica*), one in a Swamp Chestnut Oak (*Quercus lyrata*), and one in a Water Ash (*Fraxinus caroliniana*).

Other vegetation in the immediate area included Water Hickory (*Carya aquatica*), Water Locust (*Gleditsia aquatica*), *Styrax* (*Styrax* sp.) Sycamore (*Plantanus occidentalis*), Water Oak (*Quercus niger*), Swamp Privet (*Forestiera acuminata*), *Ilex* (*Ilex decidua*), and patches of Yellow Pond Lily (*Nuphar advena*) covered the water's surface.

Most nests were separated laterally by distances of twenty-five or thirty feet although two different Tupelo trees contained two nests each, about four feet apart. The nests were twig type platforms although more substantially built than those of other similar sized herons nests. Many

contained leaves and a few were extremely bulky, suggesting a probable re-use of past years' nests.

In marked contrast to many noisy ardeid breeding colonies this night heron colony was very quiet. We heard an occasional "quock" from adults and a weak cheeping note from several young. Several adults returned to their nests or limbs nearby and sat silently for long periods. Their closeness to us revealed their disproportionately large eyes with scarlet iris.

On 19 June 1975 Robert A. Norris, Milton Hopkins III, and I went into the heronry area by boat. Water levels had fallen approximately one foot. Based on much previous experience in heronries I fully expected to see a marked decrease in numbers of occupants due to "normal" attrition in nesting accidents. Instead all nests contained some young birds showing much increase in size with about seventy-five percent of the total number of nests containing four young and in two cases five young birds each. Some of the older young were almost fully feathered and capable of sustained flight. Several of the half grown birds flew short distances and fell into the water. They immediately began swimming with a backward and forward pumping motion of the head and neck, regained their footing on branches and trunks of small trees, and began returning to their nesting trees.

Milton Hopkins III visited the area in early May 1976 and reported this colony in the same location, but did not make a nest count. C. William Dopson has previously reported a solitary nesting of this species in Telfair County at Little Ocmulgee State Park (*Oriole* 27:35-36).

I wish to thank Dr. Robert A. Norris, and C. William Dopson for identification of woody vegetation mentioned in this note.

Milton Hopkins, Jr., Rt. 5, Osierfield, Fitzgerald, Georgia 31750.

FROM THE FIELD—SOUTH GEORGIA

L. A. Wells had early records near Columbus with a Rough-winged Swallow at Bussey's Lake on 7 March 1976 and a Louisiana Waterthrush on 5 March. Also near Columbus, James Miller saw an American Kestrel on 20 March and a Great Crested Flycatcher on 21 March. Sue Chamblis saw a Barn Swallow, Yellow Warbler, and nesting Canada Goose at Callaway Gardens on 28 March. Terry Moore and John Swiderski reported Black Rails answering taped calls at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge on 1 May. Joe Kight and I saw a Brown Pelican, 1 Laughing Gull, 4 Herring Gulls, 1 Common and 1 Forster's Tern on Lake Seminole in Decatur County on 14 May.

Charles Erwin saw a Mississippi Kite in Thomas County on 29 July which adds to the evidence of local breeding. Gray Catbirds were seen again during the summer of 1976 near the Neel home in Thomasville where a nest of that species was found the previous summer. Shorebird migration in Thomas County was noted as early as 29 July when I saw a Solitary and a Spotted Sandpiper. Noel Wamer, Charles Erwin, and I saw at the same pond on 29 July, 13 Pectoral, 4 Solitary, 2 Spotted, and 1 Least Sandpiper and 2 Lesser Yellowlegs.

(Compiled by Robert L. Crawford, Tall Timbers Research Station, Rt. 1, Box 160, Tallahassee, Fla. 32304.)

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