

MISSISSIPPI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Compiled by: W. H. Turcotte

FALL MEETING AND FIELD TRIP TO WASHINGTON COUNTY

About thirty members and guests attended the Greenville, Mississippi meeting and field trip to Yazoo Refuge and Leroy Percy Park. Mr. James Dale, Manager, Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, gave an informative program consisting of a movie, So Little Time, a slide series on Yazoo Refuge and exhibited live specimens of alligators up to three years of age that were propagated in captivity from eggs or young specimens collected on the refuge. The seafood dinner was enjoyed by everyone.

A downpouring of rain disrupted birding activities during all of the Saturday field trip. The group visited Yazoo Refuge headquarters, display pen and goose enclosure. There were good numbers of ducks and a few geese present on the refuge but they were dispersed and only a few roads permitted access and viewing. The field trip included a visit to Leroy Percy Park and again the rain disrupted birding. Water stood in low places all over the park. Most everyone stayed under the shelter of the lodge or by the log fire. We enjoyed a lunch of fried chicken and french fries served family style.

Our thanks to Mr. Louis P. Cashman, Jr. and to the Ed Alexanders of Greenville for making arrangements and to Mr. Dale for the hospitality at Yazoo Refuge and the program Friday evening.

PECULIAR MASS MOVEMENTS OF BLUE JAYS ALONG THE ALABAMA, MISSISSIPPI AND LOUISIANA COASTS IN OCTOBER 1972

"Workers at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory observed some rather strange movements of blue jays Cyanocitta cristata on the Mississippi and Alabama coasts during the week of October 10 to 16. The birds always seemed to be flying in a westerly direction, but they were evidently very tired or starved, or both, and fishermen in Alabama reported seeing them falling into the water near Dauphin Island.

Dead birds were seen washed up on the northern beach (inside waters) at about 15 to every 50 yards, which would be about 2,000 birds to the nautical mile.

On Petit Bois Island in Mississippi, the birds were washed up at about the same rate. The flying birds were seen in flocks of about 100 and presumably most of those that made it ashore survived.

Shrimpers in the Gulf off the mouth of the river in Louisiana, reported tired blue jays resting on their boats and workers from the offshore oil rigs reported the same thing. Some of this information reached Dr. George H. Lowery of the Louisiana State Museum of Natural History, who discussed it with me when I called him about the Mississippi situation.

There was no harsh weather condition which would have blown these birds offshore had they been migrating, for the fall of 1972 on the Gulf coast has been warm, dry and altogether mild.

The Northern blue jay, if this sub-species is valid, is known to come South but it is not known to cross the Gulf of Mexico. Two specimens in the Laboratory freezer have lengths falling in the over-lap zone of the Northern and Southern forms.

It was assumed that this peculiar movement lasted for about a week because badly decayed carcasses were found on the beaches, while tired birds were still flying by.

The facts are that large numbers of blue jays flying in discreet flocks came out of the Gulf in a southeasterly direction and came ashore in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana from about October 6 to 10 October 1972, along the crescent from Mobile Bay to the mouth of the Mississippi River. Many birds did not make it ashore and fell into the water, even in the bays. This peculiar flight is not related to any known pattern of migration of blue jays, nor to any known weather condition which might have blown the birds offshore. As was stated by Burke, McGraw and Smith (in press), the explanation of this strange phenomenon is at present purely a matter of conjecture."

S/ Gordon Gunter
Corresponding Secretary
Ocean Springs, Mississippi

WASHINGTON COUNTY NOTES:

"From 9-1-72 through today my wife and I have made 21 field trips. Thought I'd report sightings of possible interest. I noticed in American Birds, Dec. 1971 issue, the "Blue List", and have included reports on any of these birds seen during period:

Great Blue Heron - only one seen (10/8 @ Yazoo Refuge)

Wood Ibis - three seen by us on two occasions: 2 on 9/9 @ James, Mississippi and 1 on 10/9 Levee North of Greenville. James Sanders from Kosciusko, reports he saw ⁺125 on 9/7 @ Millers Bend area North of Greenville.

White Ibis - 9/15 - 15 imm Levee N. of G'ville; 10/13 - 6 imm @ Yazoo;
10/14 - 6 imm 2 ad. @ Yazoo - none since

White Fronted Geese - 10/29 - 1 imm, 1 ad. @ Yazoo with Canada Geese; again on 11/4 - none since

Black Vulture - one @ Yazoo (seldom see vultures here).

Marsh Hawk - 3 seen during period in Yazoo-Percy Park Area - 2 female 1 male

Chimney Swift - 10/28 - 1 @ Yazoo (1st ever seen by us in our area)

Vermilion Flycatcher - 1 female @ L. Jackson: 1st seen 10/24 - seen 4 or 5
times since and she was still there today (11/28)

Tree Swallows - about 10,000 seen @ Millers Bend N-of G-ville over River -
still in area 11/24

Short-billed Marsh Wren - 1 @ Yazoo 11/24

E. Bluebird - 6 @ Percy Park 11/18 and 11/19. Polly Mock of Greenville reports
that in October she saw about 50 on Arkansas side of River just
South of G'ville Bridge.

Loggerhead Shrike - One seen on each of 5 trips; two seen on one trip: 10/1
thru 11/19

Yellowthroat - 1 male in Spring plumage @ Yazoo as late as 11/24."

S/ Ed Alexander Jr.
Box 659
Greenville, Mississippi 38701

EVENING GROSBEAKS

On November 24, 1972, I spotted a small flock (12 - 15 birds) of Evening Gros-
beaks (Hesperiphona vespertina vespertina) on the Marion County Game Management Area.
Exact location: Township 2 North, Range 17 West, Section 5.

The birds were first noticed in a longleaf pine. They soon left the pine to
loaf in a yellow poplar. Don Lewis, 425 S. 16th Ave., Hattiesburg, Miss. 39401

PASS CHRISTIAN NOTES

"First arrival White throated Sparrow - Nov. 7/72

Chipping Sparrow first arrival Nov. 10/72

Oct. 25/72 - Locality, 1102 West Beach, Pass Christian, Mississippi in my garden
and feeding at the bird feeder - 4 - White Winged doves."

S/ Mrs. George R. Smith
Pass Christian, Mississippi 39571

BIRDING ON THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

by

Jacob H. Miller

Anxious to explore the bird life of the Mississippi Gulf Coast when I moved here
almost two years ago, I was at first disappointed. Although there were many birds
around, the number of species did not meet my expectations. I have since learned
that the Mississippi coast is rich in avian life despite the fact that it is some-
what of a blind spot between two adjacent flyways. The secret to birding in this
area is in knowing a few key spots. So here is a short guide to these areas.

There are extensive pine forests covering the coast area where the interesting species are often difficult to find. Lyman Fish Hatchery, easily found by following the signs upon reaching Lyman on Highway 49, is a virtual oasis in this forest because of the patchwork of fish ponds, an ideal habitat for wading birds, shorebirds, and waterfowl. The abundance of insects and the water supply tend to concentrate many passerines as well.

I have personally recorded over 100 species representing 35 families, including such specialties as a Glossy Ibis and a Sprague's Pipit. Lyman is full of surprises. Imagine, for example, watching 1000 White Ibis climbing higher and higher in a thermal, flashing silver with each turn in the sun, or flushing scores of snipe at close range. As well as birds, there is an abundance of reptiles, amphibians, nutria, and interesting plants. One can almost expect something new on each visit to this small wildlife sanctuary.

As you return to Highway 49 and go south into Gulfport, you will come to the harbor area where birding is good during any season. Spring is an especially good time to see the variety of gulls and terns. With close scrutiny you may even find a nest of the effervescent Least Tern on the beaches. There is also a rather large Least Tern colony near the shrimp harbor. The large open grassy areas should not be overlooked, especially during migration.

Winter is perhaps my favorite season for birding at the harbor. On almost any given day, upwards of two hundred Black Skimmers can be seen nestled on the sand spits, or skimming for fish in the shallow water. Loons, Horned Grebes, mergansers, Buffleheads, and other ducks may be seen diving throughout this area. An occasional Oldsquaw may even be spotted. Shorebirds in abundance may be seen working in the beaches for their daily supply of crustaceans. The harbor area can be very productive despite the heavy traffic of people and automobiles.

Belle Fontaine Beach, located between Ocean Springs and Pascagoula, may be one of the most exciting areas on the whole Mississippi Gulf Coast. Perhaps the easiest way to find this beach is by asking directions in Ocean Springs. It will be well worth your trouble to find it. Here one may find several habitats capsuled into a small area. On one side of the small winding road is an extensive salt marsh containing large numbers of rails, wading birds, shorebirds, waterfowl, and birds of prey in the proper seasons. Between the marsh and the beach lies a dune area lined with live oaks and magnolias which are often filled with passerines.

In October 1971, I saw three Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, a Western Kingbird, and a Peregrine Falcon at Belle Fontaine within a week. One Saturday during this same month, I saw one of the most thrilling sights of my life. It was a very windy, cool day, one that seemed at first ill-fated. However, while men may retire indoors, wild things must continue the constant struggle to survive, and so it was on this day. Clinging to every tree and fighting the strong wind were thousands of Monarch butterflies pausing during their long journey. Just offshore thirty or more Frigatebirds were plying the winds with expert agility. Belle Fontaine Beach is a place of awesome beauty and will be very fulfilling even if your bird count is low.

Wherever you travel on the Mississippi coast, open eyes will reveal something of interest. These three areas should be of special interest to birders and offer many hours of exploration and pleasure.

WESTERN GREBE SIGHT RECORD

Miss Christine Berry and Mrs. William G. Wills, Jr. sighted a Western grebe north of Highway 43 along the "Pipeline Road" on Ross Barnett Reservoir on December 2, 1972. The bird was among ruddy ducks, several canvasbacks and at least four horned grebes. The bird was examined closely and leisurely at close range through telescopes and all distinguishing features including yellow bill were identified. A close check of the area was made by the writer on the following day but the bird had departed from the area.

The above is the first known occurrence record for the species in Mississippi.
W. H. Turcotte

ADULT BALD EAGLE

A bald eagle in full adult plumage is being sighted on Barnett Reservoir. Wendell Neal, Kosciusko, Mississippi reported a sighting on December 8, 1972 over the Natchez Trace where it parallels the north shoreline below Highway 43, in Madison County.
WHT

