

MOS NEWSLETTER

Summer 1991

Volume 36, Number 2

LOOKING AHEAD:

The Mississippi Ornithological Society will hold its 1991 Fall Meeting on the Gulf Coast (headquarters in Harrison County) on the 1st weekend in November--Nov. 1, 2 and 3. Please reserve that time and plan to be "part of the gang" attending that occasion! More details of plans, arrangements and info on reservations will come later, when available. See Toups and Jackson, "Birds and Birding on the Mississippi Gulf Coast," University Press (1987) for the inside dope on what species to expect--then come expecting some of the unexpected! (If you don't have a copy of T&J, well shame on you. See your favorite bookseller, or call Lydia's Audubon Shop at Waveland, MS to remedy that condition.)

The MOS "Spring" Meeting appears likely to be moved to an earlier-than-usual date (early March?) and to be somewhere upstate. The reason is to avoid close scheduling to the place and time for the biennial meeting of the Am. Birding Assoc. (ABA), which will be nearby at Mobile, AL on April 20-26, 1992. ABA members should have already received their convention booklet describing activities and including a registration form by which to reserve spots for the desired activities: Wed, Fri., Sun a.m. fieldtrips; Mon. identification workshops; Thurs. free special programs (bird photography, computerizing records, hearing aids). There are six evenings of fine after-dinner speakers. This meeting won't be nearby again in this century! If you are not a member, might be interested in attending, but need more info, you may obtain such a mailing by calling ABA at 1-800-835-2473. Be forewarned--there are fees for almost all activities, in addition to the \$20 general registration fee and the cost of meals and lodging. Reservations for choice of activities and times are on "first come" basis; thus, reservations may need to be submitted promptly after the 15 September opening date for mailing your reservations. This should be a prime time for bird migration on the Alabama Coast.

LOOKING BACKWARD:

Minutes of the MOS Meeting, May 18, 1991
Starkville, Mississippi

The Spring 1991 Meeting of the Mississippi Ornithological Society was held at the Regal Inn, Starkville, MS on May 18, 1991.

President Terry Schiefer welcomed all out-of-towners and requested that new members and guests introduce themselves. He thanked the Oktibbeha Audubon Society for hosting the meeting, and expressed appreciation to Martha Ward and Nellie Hughes for organizing the meeting.

Pres. Schiefer reported that a Board of Directors Meeting had been

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held on the coast on March 21, 1991, at which time a general discussion was held to consider future programs and activities of the MOS. He discussed his hopes for the future direction of the organization and possible ways of recruiting new members. He suggested that ads might be placed in birding magazines, offering field trips across the State. He advised that a form would be sent out to members, asking for phone numbers and information for the membership list. He also said that he planned to appoint someone to rewrite and update the by-laws. Another goal will be to get the Mississippi Kite up to date. He reported that a new Mississippi Checklist will be available next Fall. He also reported that the Bird Records Committee was in the process of writing a procedural guide for the committee's operations.

Pres. Schiefer thanked all for participating in the Oktibbeha County Breeding Bird Atlas Project. Eight groups of people participated. The "Eagle Eye Award" for the group recording the most species was presented to Gene and Shannon Knight and Jeff Wilson. The same group received the award for most confirmed nesting species, better known as the "Peeping-Tom Award."

The President introduced the after-dinner speaker, Bob Ford, of the Tennessee Department of Conservation, who gave a very interesting talk and slide show on the subject "Birds of Bottomland Hardwood Forests."*

Respectfully submitted,

Chita Cassibry, MOS Secretary

* Late Bulletin: Since the Spring Meeting, Bob Ford has extended his explorations to some residual forest lands in the Mississippi Delta and reports finding singing male Cerulean Warblers in several spots, including the Delta National Forest area. Good news! And good work, Bob; that is a species on which we've been needing to have more breeding season work done. We're looking forward to reading more details later.

Financial Report
Mississippi Ornithological Society
November 1990 - April 1991

Income and Expense Statement

Income:

Dues	297.00
Interest	163.78
Sales - Tee shirts	40.00
- Patches	40.00

\$ 540.78

Expenses:

Postage	154.73
Printing	880.34

Meeting Expenses	55.12	
Bank Charges	3.00	
		\$ 1093.19
Net Loss		\$ [552.41]

Balance Sheet

Assets:

Balance in Checking Accts.		
Gulfport	881.73	
Starkville	851.03	
Balance in Savings Acct.	2502.86	
Certificate of Deposit	2000.00	
		\$ 6235.62
Total		

COOLING THOUGHTS FOR THE LATE SUMMERTIME HEAT

Bar-headed Goose of Asia Stars in Physiological Research
 "High-Altitude Bird Flight: Exercise in a Hostile Environment"
 by M.R. Fedde, Kansas State Univ. School of Veterinary Science,
 in News in Physiological Sciences, Vol. 5: 191-193, October 1990.

Anyone aware of the migratory route of the Bar-headed Goose from its Siberian nesting grounds to its south-Asian winter range must have wondered at its ability to fly across the Himalaya Mts. at an altitude of 29,500 ft. or 9000 meters (think how cold it must be up there!). Physiological research reviewed in this paper concludes that the adaptations enabling this include: hemoglobin in their red cells exceeds the normal capacity to carry oxygen, which then is more efficiently transferred into the cells to the critical enzymes, which also use it more efficiently in energy release to the muscle fibers; lower production by their muscles of lactic acid, which contributes greatly to fatigue; and lack of response to low ambient oxygen tension seen in mammals, consisting of constriction of the blood vessels of the lungs, thus better maintaining normal blood flow.

The Moral to This Story: (1) Those geese are "marvelously and wonderfully made" for sure; (2) don't think that you can climb Himalayan mountaintops to watch the Bar-headed Geese fly over, 'cause you don't have their gifted Physiological Features!

Echoes of the Wet Spring Weather: (from the Memphis Commercial-Appeal's "Rain Joke Contest")

Ms. Wardie Lou Jones of Ripley, MS says it was *so wet up there* that when the birds opened their mouths to sing, they gargled instead! In Blytheville, Ark. it was so wet that they had to put an anchor on the water-table to keep it from floating away. Someone in the same town says they gave away the family dog and bought a beaver, and a Marianna, Ark. lady said that her dogwood trees had to learn to dog-paddle! Can you top that?

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UNUSUAL FEEDING RESPONSE OF A FLYING JUVENILE
RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

by
William H. Turcotte

On 25 May 1988 between 2:30 and 3:00 p.m., David Watts and I observed an unusual feeding response by a fledged juvenile Red-bellied Woodpecker. We were on my front porch in Richland while Watts was photographing Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at a feeder. The young Red-bellied Woodpecker landed on a seed feeder beside the driveway about 30 feet from the hummingbird feeder. Watts made an exposure using a photo flash for fill-in. Immediately after the flash, the woodpecker flew directly at the camera and Watts, alighting and perching for 10 sec or longer on his forehead, with wings and tail extended over the camera. The bird flew away only when Watts nudged it off; two distinct sets of claw marks remained on his forehead.

We infer that the flash from the camera triggered a feeding response. Young woodpeckers in a nest-hole likely respond to the blocking of light from the entrance followed by its quick return as the parent bird enters the cavity with food. This unusual behavior by a flying juvenile, as far as I can determine, has not been reported previously.

MOSers Appearing in Print Elsewhere

1. "Will-O'-the-Wisp" by Jerome Jackson, in The Living Bird, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 28-32, winter 1991. An essay on the status of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Cuba, including a 3-sec. sighting by Jerry! Also, comments about birds, birders and Cuban birding in general under the Castro regime.
2. "The Odd Couple" by Marvin Davis, in WildBird, vol. 7, no.7, pp.20-22, July 1991. An encounter with the female Red-backed Hawk from South America, which has been spending summers since 1987 near Gunnison, Colorado, and her mate, a male Swainson's Hawk, is described. Theories on the question of how she happened first to arrive in Colorado are described.
3. "Grass Menagerie" by Jerry Jackson, in Birder's World, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 48-52, August 1991. A view of the place of native (non-lawn) grasses in making a yard environment attractive to birds.
4. "Panhandle Playa" by Marvin Davis, in Birder's World, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 20-22, August 1991. Essay describing a novel experience at a freshly-flooded playa lake in the Oklahoma Panhandle, serving as a remarkable, though temporary, attraction for post-breeding migrant waterbirds in the heat of August.
5. "Big Day at Black Mesa" by Marvin Davis, in Bird-Watcher's Digest, vol. 13, no. 6, pp. 55-61, July-August 1991. An account of an effort to exceed the 100 species mark on a hot day in August

while driving across 400+ miles of Oklahoma territory.

6. "Classical Polyandry in the West Indian Woodpecker on Abaco, Bahamas" by Lori A. Willimont, Jerome A. Jackson and Bette J.S. Jackson, in Wilson Bulletin, vol. 103, no. 1, pp.124-125, March 1991.

7. "Nest-site Fidelity in Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers" by Danny Ingold in Wilson Bulletin, vol. 103, no. 1, pp. 118-122, March 1991.

WATCHER AT A MISSISSIPPI KITE NEST

by
Nona Herbert

In the spring and summer of 1991, I had the opportunity to repeat my one similar experience (in 1976) of spending many enjoyable hours watching the progress of events at the nest of a pair of Mississippi Kites. The latest nest was at the campground in the Great River Road State Park, which is located just west of Rosedale, Mississippi on The River. I first spotted the nest on the 29th of May.

The pair of kites took turns incubating the eggs during early June. The one on the nest for some time would apparently hear the mate coming to take over, and would arise and drop from the nest before the mate's arrival. The one relieving the other would turn the eggs before settling onto them. Periodically they would come bringing new branches to be added to the nest structure. Leaves still attached would be removed and dropped into the nest for lining, then the stick would be incorporated while the eggs were being brooded. Eventually, the sides of the nest became high enough to nearly hide the adult from sight. While on the nest, the birds would spend time preening, but always remaining on the alert to any activities--loud noises or movements--around them in the park. After hatching, little further nest repair efforts were noted; rather, as the young grew the sides of the nest settled from the adults standing on the rim to offer food to the baby (only a single young was ever seen).

Returning after an absence from June 17th to 23rd, I spent most of the 24th checking on the kite nest. After a long while of watching, I finally saw a baby kite being fed. The park ranger who promised to watch the nest during my absence had told me that he'd not seen the pair feeding young yet. The camping spot from which I observed the nest was occupied by a couple from Illinois. When I asked if they minded my setting up my scope and tripod, they responded, "fine, and we'll look too." After a short viewing, I left to bird around the park, while the couple were packing to leave.

When I resumed watching, I saw one adult bird (female?) sitting on the nest; soon the mate brought the sitting bird a frog, which she(?) promptly tore apart and began to eat. Toward the last

of this episode a strange thing happened. She(?) was busily tearing the frog and eating when she abruptly stopped, looked at the mate, and presented the remainder of the frog to him(?). He quickly swallowed the food and dropped from the nest to fly out of view.

A half-hour later, he brought a large insect to her, which she ate. Much later, she flew off the nest as he returned again. He approached the nest and began to tear apart the prey item, and then leaned over the nest to feed a portion to a baby kite down in the nest. This was when I first caught several glimpses of something white moving in the nest. At the return of a parent some time later, I saw more clearly the little white-downed baby kite. I knew from my previous experience that this would continue for another month if all went well at the nest.

The identifiable food items were mostly cicadas and dragonflies, plus several frogs or lizards each day, but never a mouse as I saw once in 1976. During the heat of mid-day, one of the parents would stand so as to shade the baby kite in the nest, often holding the wings half-spread to give more shade.

On July 2nd, after many morning feedings, one adult came to land on a perch above the nest before sidling down to the nest with a dragonfly in its beak. The baby alerted, raising its diddling head, with neck muscles not yet strong enough for stability, several times while also extending its wings. The adult transferred the insect to its talon and tore it apart with its beak to offer a smaller bite to the baby. The young bird responded by trying to climb the side of the nest to evade the proffered food--it seemed not to be hungry enough to welcome the offering. The parent poked with its beak several times as the baby turned its head away; another poke, another rejection--this was repeated several times as the adult moved around the nest to press the issue. Finally accepting the baby's reluctance to feed, the parent consumed the food itself; at the close of the episode the baby leaned against the parent's breast, the latter gazing down at it in a most charming picture from my grandmotherly viewpoint.

On July 5th, twelve days after my first seeing the baby, at about 11 a.m. with one parent standing on the nest rim, the baby maneuvered itself up on the rim with its head down into the nest, held its tail high and made an evacuation over the side of the nest--a developmental landmark! This I presume to be instinctual, for it couldn't have been copied from the parents, whom I have never seen evacuate at the nest. On the very next day, I saw it preen for the first time, an action which it could have copied from the adults, seeing that they do preen at the nest.

From about this time onward, the baby spent much of its waking time when not being fed in periods of constant exercise--rapid wing flapping, walking about the nest using its wings to balance--and preening. The black feathers underneath the wings seemed to sprout overnight; then more appeared as stripes down each side of the

chest, then down the back. The head was the last part on which dark feathers appeared to replace the white down; it first was a dark stripe from the eyes down the nape. Soon the breast was covered with chestnut colored feathers. The young bird's plumage looked loose and unkempt, unlike that of the rather sleek adults.

While still quite awkward, it began leaving the nest to explore the surrounding branches, first climbing on the nest rim, then hopping with wings outspread as far as two feet along the limb supporting the nest, finally turning back with much nervous wing-flapping. Soon it "branched out" to a slightly higher limb above the nest to which it could rise with one or two flaps. On July 28th (35th day since first sighting) J.C. and I saw the young kite briefly as it stood quietly on the rim of the nest gazing over the park. This was the last day to see it spending its day in the nest.

On the 30th I found the nest empty. The baby was not in sight, but the adults were flying over the area of the nest tree. I walked through the trees to reach the one holding the nest, searching the branches above me for the bird that I felt must be close at hand. Viewing a large tree that had lots of dead limbs at the top, I spotted the young kite. Just as I spotted it, one adult flew to it and perched to give it an insect, which it tore apart and ate. Then the immature flew to a nearby tree where it was almost lost among the leaves as it hopped from limb to limb. An adult was then seen flying to the nest where it began a call that sounded like "peet doodle ooo" over and over. Finally, with a slight croaking sound, "baby" flew to the nest tree, landed on a limb above the nest, and the adult presented it a frog, which it tore and ate with considerable effort. That croaking was the only vocalization that I ever heard the young kite make. On the next several days the adults would bring food to the nest and call; then the immature bird would come and eat.

On August 2nd the young kite stayed at the nest for about two hours until the time I had to leave. On August 4th I went in early evening to see if the immature spent the night at the nest. I stayed until dark, but it didn't appear, and I never saw it again.

That's how it is with young'uns--they leave a hole in your heart when they leave the nest and fly far away!

SUMMER/EARLY FALL BIRDLINE: Not many exciting reports have come to the Editor's attention so far. Two Western Kingbirds made a rather early arrival on the Coast by ca. the 1st of August. Not to be outdone, the North Side shone with a late July pewee singing in Gene and Shannon Knight's yard (south of Oxford)--but its call was that of a Western Wood-Pewee! Gene also recently (9-4) completed a remarkable "double" for 1991--a Marbled Godwit for both the northbound and southbound migration seasons in the Yocona River bottomland of Lafayette Co. Doug Ingram and a coworker with the Corps of Engineers reported an ad. Bald Eagle at Grenada L. on July 5th; G.K. had 2 near that time at Malmaison WMA in SW Grenada Co.

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MISSISSIPPI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Organized 30 April 1955

TERENCE SCHIEFER
President
Dept. of Entomology
Miss. State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762

JEROME A. JACKSON
Editor: Mississippi Kite
Dept. of Biological Sciences
Miss. State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762

GERRY MORGAN
Vice President
412 Walda Drive
Biloxi, MS 39533

W. MARVIN DAVIS
Editor: MOS Newsletter
308 Lewis Lane
Oxford, MS 38655

CHITA CASSIBRY
Secretary
3243 Nottingham Road
Ocean Springs, MS 39564

JANET DUBUISSON
Treasurer
22410 Glad Acres
Pass Christian, MS 39571

All persons interested in Mississippi bird life are invited to join the MOS. Annual dues: Life, \$100; Sustaining, \$20; Individual, \$10; *Family, \$15; (Junior/Golden Age: Individual, \$4, Family, \$8); Subscribing (Institutional) \$10. Please send 1991 dues not yet paid to the Treasurer. * Please note correction of error in the February Newsletter for these membership categories!

Return Address
P.O. Box 515
University
MISSISSIPPI
38655



W H Turcotte
240 Lowe Circle
Richland, MS 39218

