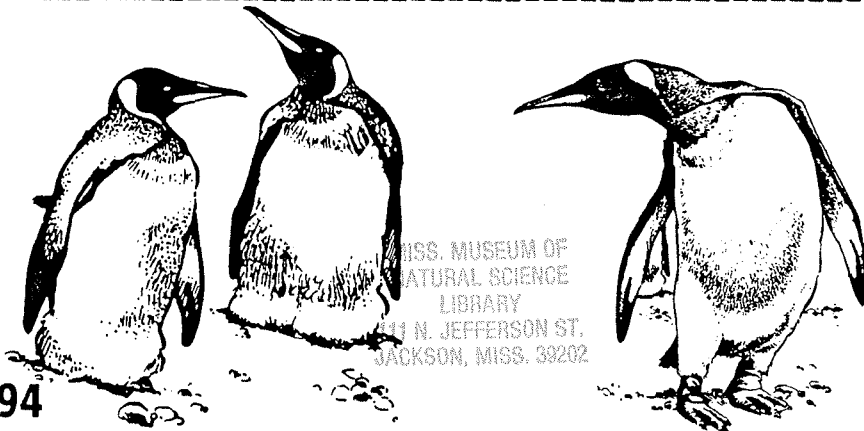

MISSISSIPPI
ORNITHOLOGICAL
SOCIETY
NEWLETTER

VOL. 39, No. 3
FALL (SEPTEMBER) 1994



LOOKING AHEAD:

1994 Fall MOS Meeting

MOS's Fall Meeting will be held on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in conjunction with the Inland Bird Banding Association (IBBA) on **21-23 October 1994**. Registration, \$12.00 per person, will be at Arlean Hall at the Methodist Seashore Assembly, on US 90 in east Biloxi, all day on Friday. Better yet, send it in advance (see below). The usual Friday evening gathering from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. will be a reception for the IBBA visitors from far and wide hosted jointly by the Gulf Coast Audubon Society and MOS. This will be held in the Marine Education Center located at the extreme east end of Biloxi (on the shore just before the US 90 bridge to Ocean Springs).

Field trip arrangements for Saturday and Sunday will be announced Friday evening; probably groups will be leaving from the Assembly. Daytime papers sessions of IBBA and the **Saturday evening 6:00 p.m. banquet** (\$12.00) will be held at the Methodist Seashore Assembly. The **7:30 after-dinner program** will be at a separate location than the dinner, so if you should be unable to attend the banquet, come for the program in Arlean Hall to be given by Bob and Martha Sargent on "Banding Hummingbirds." Their activities have led to the verification of the identity of numerous late fall/early winter wanderers from the West to the Gulf-South/Mid-South area.

A brief business meeting of MOS will be after dinner--probably after moving to Arlean Hall, at ca. 7:00 p.m. before the program time. Please plan to attend; it is essential for at very least the biennial election of officers. So, mark your calendar, reserving that weekend, and remember to **make motel reservations NOW!** Advance registration and payment for banquet meals should be made by filling out the blank on **page 9** and mailing with your check. In case there should turn out to be room to spare in the housing facilities at Methodist Assembly, beyond those needed for IBBA registrants, MOSers may be notified by telephone shortly before the meeting to allow possible cancellation of other reservations and a switch. To be on a waiting list for this possibility--first come, first served basis--please indicate on the preregistration form your interest in: double room; single room; or dormitory space(s) (group camp style) for either men or women.

SHOREBIRD IDENTIFICATION FIELD EXERCISE

MOS members are invited to join in a September 3-5 outing in West Tennessee focussed on field identification of shorebirds. This will be led by Jeff Wilson (whose shorebird photos were much appreciated at the Spring Meeting) at Shelby County, TN, and northward to Island 13 and the Reelfoot Lake vicinity, over that extended Labor Day weekend. For details call Jeff at 901/388-6482.

LOOKING BACK:

"Better Late than Never" Department

Tucker Award Verse (Fall Meeting, 1993)

When it comes to bats and beetles
 Butterflies and birds
 Our Tucker recipient is a man of many words.
 He's always ready to share
 His many outstanding "finds,"
 He's one of the best birders in our State
 In many peoples' minds.
 His respect for Mother Nature
 Presented him a fantastic "lifer,"
 So if you're in his neighborhood
 Go birding with Terry Schiefer.
 --by Shannon Knight

From the Field--Summer & Early Fall, 1994

June/July saw extra-heavy rainfall in the north, raising the levels of Corps of Engineers lakes much above average. The sounds of the power lawn mowers were strong in June and July replaced the fading sound of the chain-saw in the land, as the post-ice storm cleanup neared completion. However, outside of cities and towns, abundant fallen limbs yet blocked most favorite birding lanes & woodland paths.

On June 10th, two typically-late White-rumped Sandpipers were at Lower Lake (Sardis Dam), but one ad. Caspian Tern on the same sandbar was more exceptional. Several shorebirds were similarly late-lingering at the Tippo catfish ponds (Tallahatchie Co.), but 7 Black-necked Stilts were suspected to be nesting thereabouts, or at least thinking about it. A nesting colony of Great Blue Herons found by Gene Knight on upper reaches of Grenada Lake in Yalobusha Co. also had several pairs of Anhingas, a first confirmed nesting effort for the Tri-lakes area. As usual, southbound shorebirds returned by mid-July.

In late July and early August, Black Terns and Least Terns gathered and were seen repeatedly at the Tippo fish ponds, along with several species of sandpipers. A few miles south, Gene Knight was much surprised to find a singing Lark Sparrow. A Willet was an unusual species there at mid-month, and 10 Black-necked Stilts were present; but were they migrants or ones that had been around all summer? Least Terns (ca. 50!) were using a drawn-down fish pond in Tunica Co. on 8 August. On the hummer front, a very early adult male Rufous Hummingbird was seen and banded at Starkville as early as July 27th! [See below for a similarly early Peregrine just north of Desoto County line in TN.]

1994 Purple Martin Migration at the Mississippi River

Nona Herbert, Shaw, MS
(3 August 1994)

This year J.C. and I have again witnessed a spectacular southward migration of Purple Martins. We have been seeing thousands since June and it continues even to this day. Our own colony left July 6th, or after dark on the 5th. None were seen until the 9th when a transient flock of about 80, mostly streak-throated immatures and females, rested on the wires above the gourds used by "our" martins, and on the TV antenna above the house. When we would go to the river in late afternoon, we would see thousands of Purple Martins perched in dead trees, as well as some in live ones and on TV antennas of houses near the levee, and on power lines that crossed the levee. The immatures tended to have a difficult time perching on the wires, often losing their balance and having to fly off the perch. Judging by our observations, the hatch of martins this year must have been tremendous. We wonder at times where are the adults among the masses of immatures.

On July 16 we borrowed the key to the levee gate to ride the levee between Lake Ferguson and the Mississippi River, where most of the action has been seen. We can no longer enter the old Archer Island Gun Club, which lost the lease to others. Now we have arranged to get in on the Gilnockie Hunt Club in sight of Archer Island. The trees were damaged by the ice storm; those not killed outright have brought out strange big bunches of leaves directly from the bare branches. There are many swamp privet bushes in this very sandy area, and lots of trapped water in holes left after the river flooded this spring.

Because there was an alert for severe thunderstorms with possible hail, we were watching the weather. Martins were skimming the surface of the river, flying as fast as they could, and not feeding at all. There were dead trees covered with martins that were apparently resting before going on. As we observed the storm clouds approaching at 6:35 p.m., we noticed the clouds changing from white to dark grey to dark purple as it came closer. Seemingly the birds sensed danger because the martins began to alight in the dead trees and on the abundant green swamp privet. They would become so tightly packed on the limbs that not another one could land, so the late ones hovered frantically overhead. Some even tried to cling to the trunks of the trees, making scrabbling sounds as their claws slipped.

There was no way to count all the martins on one tree. We slowly rode up to one tree that was loaded so that I could take a picture (copies enclosed). The birds hardly took notice. When I stepped out to shoot, I noticed that there were thousands and thousands of martins high in the sky in front of the clouds. They were so thick that it seemed they would have collided. It was necessary to use binoculars to get the true picture, many were so high as to be merely swirling specks. But I discovered that soaring below the martins there were also countless numbers of Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets and Little Blues (both white and blue). I wished for my better camera to capture the view, but in my mind's eye I will see it forever--it gives me something to think about in my wheel chair days!

Report on the American Kestrel Nest Box Project

Penny Kochtitzky, Hattiesburg, MS
(3 June 1994)

Here is the latest on our situation; the response to our call for volunteer participants was not overwhelming, to say the least. In 1993 the Executive Board of the Mississippi Wildlife Federation voted to support this project, which meant that the Federation was willing to support the venture in any way that was feasible. In the meantime, Jim Puckett had enlisted the help of the Dept. of Transportation in putting up ten boxes donated by the Pine Woods Audubon Society Chapter. These were strapped to various highway signs in the Hattiesburg area. They have been up for a little more than a year now with no exciting occurrences--we are having trouble convincing the kestrels to stay around here to nest.

A 4-H director called from up Brookhaven way, and I sent plans for making the boxes to her. She aimed to use them as a project for her group to build and install in a rural area near there. I also sent plans to Bob Lowrance from Jackson, who has an interest in beginning a kestrel box trail around there. He and his wife Pat are involved in wildlife rehabilitation.

I think that the exhausting part about the whole idea is that the project is moving so slowly. Even if it were possible to build 10,000 boxes and put them up around our state, there is no assurance that the kestrels would want to use them (*What?! Where's that "build them and they will come!" spirit?--Ed.*). There is also a problem of maintaining them, as the Starlings must be discouraged from using them, and they must be cleaned out periodically. The only non-kestrel inhabitants that we are tolerating in this area are the Eastern Bluebirds, several pairs of which have used our boxes.

I have sent plans to many people around Mississippi, and it would be nice to hear back from them about their progress. I have contacted people building shopping centers near known kestrel habitats, thinking that it would be an excellent public relations gesture to put up a nest box or two at such sites, where it was appropriate.

The State of Florida has 400+ boxes out on their highways, and they have had phenomenal success already. Many additional data on kestrels have accrued from the project. At this point the kestrel nesting box trail concept in Mississippi seems to be in need of many more people who are interested in encouraging these beautiful creatures to nest in our state. If anyone wishes to receive nest box plans, just write to me: Penny Kochtitzky, 273 Ralph Rawls Rd. Hattiesburg, MS 39402, and I will be happy to send them to you. Since I have built one by myself, I know that it is not difficult to do! Please join me in extending our state's hospitality to the American Kestrels.

MERGER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Taking wedding vows this summer on 12 August at Starkville were two staunch MOS members, Terence Schiefer and Marion Hutto. They are at home now in a country residence west of Starkville. V-P. David Watts also was married early in the summer, but details are unavailable.

MORE SIGHTINGS BY MR. T:

Defense Mechanisms of Cicadas Against Birds

William H. Turcotte, Richland, MS

In May of 1989 I recorded the sound of hundreds of the 13-year cicadas buzzing in the treetops around Richland. Later in the summer I recorded four other species identified only by their distinctive call sounds. One kind called only from about 8:30 a.m. until shortly after sunset and was highly irregular and rather brief. Another species heard only in willows or thickets in low wetlands called continuously only from about 11:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Two species called only in dim light well after sunset and ceased before full darkness. The 13-year cicadas called continuously from treetops, and their calls were inseparable from one another.

While attempting to record the daytime cicada over a period of 30 minutes, I noticed that it ceased to call for about 10 minutes after a Blue Jay alighted in the same tree. As soon as the jay left the tree it again began calling. Cicadas were calling in nearby trees during the time that the Blue Jay was in sight.

While recording the two species of cicadas that called after sunset, I noted that they began when all birds had gone to roost, including Cardinals, the latest. These two species have long, continuous calls ending in a slow buzz and spaced so that not more than one male is calling at any particular time--another "strategy" for success. Calls of different cicadas (like those of male green tree frogs) for attracting females are timed so as not to overlap, despite our superficial perception that they occur in a "random chorus."

Starlings were seen probing the sod of our yard, extracting pupae of the 13-year cicada, and feeding them to their nestlings in our gourds. One Cardinal and a Northern Mockingbird also were seen eating the pupae while they were emerging. After nightfall on July 4, an emerging pupa was seen being attacked by a large toad, but it was not eaten, evidently because it was covered by mud so completely that only its legs were visible.

As I was recording calls of another daytime cicada, I accidentally unintentionally played the recording of the long calls of a late-calling species. A Loggerhead Shrike flew from a distant fencerow, alighted in the tree above me, flew to our television antenna, then back to a lower tree limb. It was obviously looking for the source of the sound it had heard.

From these observations it is evident that cicadas have developed defense mechanisms against birds and other predators during their short mating and reproductive period. The daytime-calling species has short, erratic calls which tend to foil detection by Blue Jays, aided by the ability to cease calling and remain quiet for long periods when a predator is near. Another daytime-calling species with continuous calls also shows the ability to escape detection by remaining quiet when threatened, plus they call during the heat of the day when birds are less active. The two species that call between dusk and dark

escape predation because the potential avian predators have gone to roost. Finally, the 13-year cicadas succeed in overwhelming their potential predators by emerging in prodigious numbers over a short interval of time.

Sycamore Lore

We have a large sycamore tree near the corner of our house in Richland. Beginning in early May, our concrete front porch has "fuzz-balls" that come from the underside of the sycamore leaves. They resemble the "dust-bunnies" that one finds under the couch, or in an old typewriter like my 1940 model Smith-Corona. The downy substance peels or blows off as the leaves mature. At the edge of our porch we have three hummingbird feeders. On three occasions I have seen a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird approach the feeders with balls of sycamore down in their bills, then back off and fly away. Once, on May 18, 1994 I saw the female fly directly from the sycamore tree to a feeder with such down in her bill, then fly away. I suspect that the hummingbirds, and probably also the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, utilize the sycamore down for constructing their nests. Although these observations tend to support that belief, it would be well if further observations could be made to give added confirmation to this possibility.

As regular as clockwork, around the first of June our sycamore begins a "strip tease," shedding long shards of outer bark. The shards fall throughout June and almost cover the lawn beneath the tree, usually landing with the "inside" up. During daytime when exposed to the sun, the longer shards do "the twist," curling into spiral shapes. On cool nights the shards unwind to the original early morning shape.

One of our hummingbird feeders is homemade using a red plastic baby chick waterer, a quart mayonnaise jar and a 3-wire hanger attached to another wire twisted around the neck of the jar (total cost about 45 cents). Hummers seem to prefer this type of feeder and sometimes will alight on the edge. A female was seen at this feeder with a "fuzz-ball" of sycamore down stuck on one foot, evidently from getting sugar water on her feet at an earlier visit.

CALLING ATTENTION TO:

The problem of Declining Duck Populations

A story on the subject, "Saving Ducks Means Killing Predators" by Bob Marshall, emphasized the serious impact of nest predation by foxes, skunks and raccoons. Egg loss was reported to have exceeded 90% in the '93 nesting season at many sites surveyed. Increased loss over former times is blamed on the increased levels of the predator species due to a fall in trapping for furs, prices of which have seen great declines. Also, raccoons have expanded westward onto prairies formerly unoccupied by them, and thirdly, more predators are going after fewer duck nests. Despite the title, present reality is that predator reduction programs, that would have been activated in the past, have been made "politically incorrect" by pressures of animal rights lobbyists.

The upshot is that *nonlethal* predator management procedures were

to be tested during the '94 nesting season by organizations such as Delta Wildlife Foundation. These will include the following approaches: 1) Scent control--using airplanes to distribute duck-scent pellets over nesting grounds so that predators will be less successful in following a duck-scent trail to a vulnerable nest; 2) Taste Aversion--spreading chicken eggs treated with non-toxic estrogen around areas of high predation so that they will be eaten by the predators; it is hoped that the eggs will be so distasteful that predators will be conditioned to avoid egg-eating; 3) Sterilization--distributing baits laced with a sterility-inducing chemical to reduce predator reproduction and thus pressure on the ducks; 4) Nest houses--placing \$25-each plastic protective nesting tubes on elevated platforms, as was found last summer to give a high rate of nesting success, but at a high cost; 5) subsidizing of fur trappers so as to restore motivation toward that currently-legal mode of controlling predator populations.

[This story, and the next one, appeared in the March '94 issue of *Southern Outdoors*--not usually viewed by your Editor--by virtue of too much time at the Internal Medicine Associates of Oxford!]

Prospects for a Lyme Disease Vaccine

A canine vaccine against Lyme disease has been on the market for veterinary practice since 1991. [An Oxford veterinarian says that it is appropriate for dogs in this area, as canine Lyme disease is here, along with a low level of human disease.] Unfortunately, birders must expect to wait 3 to 5 more years before they can be vaccinated along with their dogs, as a longer, more strict process of development is necessary. In the meantime, use a permethrin-based deer-tick killer plus repellent, e.g., Duranon® or Permanone®, to be able to go birding with more peace of mind. [Find them in bird stores or from ABA Sales]

Early-Migrating Peregrine Bogged Down in Memphis

The 4 August Memphis Commercial-Appeal pictured the bird and recounted the rescue of **an immature Peregrine on July 30** from the middle of one of the pits at the Shelby County "supreme sewage sludge-pit shorebird scene," of which you have read herein re. the 1992 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and the 1993 Red-necked Sandpiper/Stint. As happened a couple of years ago to another Peregrine, this young bird landed in a gooey mess when it expected a solid surface, and needed rescue and a thorough cleaning. Happily, a Memphis birder, Martha Waldron, spotted the problem and was able to call on WWTP employees to retrieve the bird, which was cleaned by raptor rehabilitation personnel at the Memphis Zoo to prepare it for its release. **Note:** the date is earlier than most of us would expect we might find a Peregrine in Mississippi. Perhaps it was a product of metropolitan hacking somewhere south of the Canadian breeding range for the species.

New: "More Than You Ever Wanted to Know About Warbler Identification"

Warblers of the Americas: An Identification Guide by Jon Curson, 252 pp. Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1994. Covers all 116 species found in North, Central and South America in all major plumages via 36 color paintings plus line drawings. Also has 116 color range maps for all seasons.

BIRD LIST FOR 1994 NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATION COUNT, WARREN COUNTY 8

P-b. Grebe, 2
 Am. Wht. Pelican, 73
 D.-cr. Cormorant, 1
 Anhinga, 15
 Grt. Blue Heron, 34
 Great Egret, 310
 Snowy Egret, 124
 L. Blue Heron, 298
 Cattle Egret, 718
 Gr.-bck. Heron, 5
 Nt. Heron sp., 1
 White Ibis, 25
 Canada Goose, 101
 Wood Duck, 46
 Mallard, 15
 Bl.-winged Teal, 2
 Blk. Vulture, 102
 Turkey Vulture, 51
 Miss. Kite, 18
 Bald Eagle, 2a, 1i
 Cooper's Hawk, 1
 Red-should. Hk., 3
 Broad-winged Hk., 1
 Red-tailed Hawk, 15
 Am. Kestrel, 1
 Wild Turkey, 11
 N. Bobwhite, 19
 Common Moorhen, 1
 Killdeer, 37
 Blk-neck. Stilt, 37
 Gr. Yellowlegs, 1
 Semi. Sandpiper, 6
 Least Tern, 3
 Rock Dove, 43
 Mourning Dove, 169
 Yel.-b. Cuckoo, 22
 E. Screech-Owl, 2
 Barred Owl, 8
 Com. Nighthawk, 7
 Chuck-will's-w., 1
 Chimney Swift, 125
 Ruby-thr. Hum., 46
 B. Kingfisher, 4

Red-hd. Wood., 23
 Red-bel. " , 64
 Downy Wood., 17
 Hairy Wood., 5
 N. Flicker, 3
 Pileated W., 15
 Olive-sided Fly., 1
 E. Wood-Pewee, 28
 Acadian Fly., 53
 Grt. Crest. Fly., 33
 E. Kingbird, 37
 Horned Lark, 9
 Purple Martin, 211
 R-w. Swallow, 35
 Cliff Swallow, 10
 Barn Swallow, 335
 Blue Jay, 81
 Am. Crow, 146
 Fish Crow, 18
 Ca. Chickadee, 65
 Tufted Tit., 89
 Wht-br. Nut., 3
 Ca. Wren, 134
 House Wren, 2
 Bl.-gr. Gnat., 52
 E. Bluebird, 56
 Veery, 1
 Wood Thrush, 21
 Am. Robin, 26
 N. Mock'brd., 223
 Brn. Thrasher, 54
 Cedar Waxwing, 4
 Log. Shrike, 34
 Eur. Starling, 169
 Wht-eyed Vireo, 115
 Yel-thr. " , 16
 Red-eyed " , 71
 Tenn. Warbler, 4
 N. Parula, 54
 Yel.-rump. W., 3
 Yel-thr. W., 1
 Pine Warbler, 20
 Blk. & Wht. W., 1

Am. Redstart, 7
 Prothntry. W., 110
 Worm-eating W., 4
 Swainson's W., 4
 La. Waterthrush, 1
 Ky. Warbler, 22
 Com. Yelthrt., 35
 Hooded W., 30
 Yel-br. Chat, 62
 Summer Tanager, 87
 N. Cardinal, 341
 Blue Grosbeak, 16
 Indigo Bunting, 246
 Painted Bunting, 11
 Dickcissel, 42
 Ruf.-s. Towhee, 52
 Grasshopper Sp., 2
 Song Sparrow, 1
 Wht-thr. Sparrow, 1
 Red-w. Blkbrd., 480
 E. Meadowlark, 89
 Common Grackle, 105
 Br.-hd. Cowbird, 346
 Orchard Oriole, 103
 N. Oriole, 12
 House Finch, 4
 House Sparrow, 202

[May 14th; 8
 parties, 13
 observers; 5:45
 a.m. to 4:39 p.m.;
 mostly cloudy,
 temp. 73-81°; 116
 species; Hal Moore,
 compiler]

MOS NEWSLETTERS--BOUND BACK-ISSUES, VOLS. 1-21 (1956-1976), \$20.00
 "At the November 1993 MOS meeting, it was suggested that members might be interested in purchasing a bound volume of our historically important MOS Newsletters. The Mississippi Museum of Natural Science Library has archival copies on file, and I will be willing to have them reprinted and spiral bound. However, PREPAYMENT WILL BE REQUIRED. Checks must be received at the Museum before I can go to the printer."
 --Mary Stevens (Cut here and mail to Mary Stevens)

PRE-PUBLICATION ORDER FORM

To order, please indicate the desired quantity and your name and mailing address on this form. Make checks payable to MOS and send to:
 Mary Stevens
 Mississippi Museum of Natural Science
 111 N. Jefferson Street
 Jackson, MS 39202

Please send _____ copy/ies of the MOS NEWSLETTERS, VOL. 1-21, 1956-76 (spiral bound) at a cost of \$20.00 each to:
 NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

 (cut below & mail to Janet Dubuisson for Fall Mtg. reservations)

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All persons interested in Mississippi bird life are invited to join the MOS. Annual dues: Sustaining, \$20; Individual (regular), \$10; Family, \$15; Student, \$5; Senior, \$5; Subscribing, \$10. Life Membership, \$200. All classes of members receive the Mississippi Kite semi-annually, and the MOS Newsletter on a quarterly schedule each season. Please send unpaid '94 dues, or address changes, to: Treas. Janet Dubuisson, 22410 Glad Acres, Pass Christian, MS 39571.
