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Summer Notes From The Gulf Coast

This past summer the writers found occasion to spend approximately twenty days afield in Mississippi's three coastal counties. Tidewater and marsh areas between Clairborne in Hancock County and Bayou Casotte in Jackson County received the most attention, but several trips were also made inland in the period from May 29 through September 18, 1960. During one of these, a day was spent afloat along a stretch of the Pascagoula River in Jackson and George Counties. Offshore visits included a few hours each on Deer, Ship and Cat Islands.

The abundant and varied birdlife of the area made the trips very rewarding and several noteworthy observations were made. Of special interest were the discovery of Cattle Egrets in all three coastal counties, frequent sightings of Mottled Ducks in the marshes west of Bay St. Louis, and the appearance of a "glossy ibis" at Clairborne.

The nomenclature used here follows that presented in the A. O. U. Checklist (1957). In most cases observations are of local interest only. Except where otherwise noted, observations are by both authors (only infrequently were the authors not in company). The reader is referred to the accompanying map for any clarification concerning geography.

Observations of Interest:

White Pelican (Pelecanus erythrorhynchos) -- One was seen on July 9 and for several days thereafter in a pond at Lakeshore in sight of the Hancock County seawall.

Brown Pelican (Pelecanus occidentalis) - Only 5 were seen during the summer (3 - Gulfport, July 2; one - Cat Island, July 9; and one - Ship Island, August 26), prior to September 12 when 9 were seen in three flocks between Biloxi and Pass Christian.

Magnificent Frigate-Bird (Fregata magnificens) - Seen at various locations along the coast on every trip; larger concentrations included 75 on Cat Island, July 9, and over 200 off Biloxi, September 12.

Cattle Egret (Bubulcus ibis) -- On May 29, 1960, an adult female was collected (Williams) at Bayou Casotte in Jackson County. Another individual seen with her was probably the one seen in the vicinity August 7. September 8, one was seen flying to roost near Clairborne. September 9, one was seen among cattle at Claiborne and later in the day a specimen was taken when two were seen together in the same pasture (collected by Clawson). The next day (September 10) one was seen in the same area. On September 16, the day after a hurricane had turned inland at Pascagoula after skirting the coast, a single individual was observed (Clawson) in a wet field adjacent to the Gulfport port terminal. With sightings from all three of the state's coastal counties, it would be difficult to say whether our Cattle Egrets are coming from Alabama (where they are much more numerous of late) or Louisiana, where hundreds may be found on the delta 80 miles south of the Mississippi coast. It is likely that the species is at last closing the gap on the north Gulf coast which has remained relatively vacant despite the abundance of the species from Louisiana westward and from peninsular Florida along the Atlantic states.

Reddish Egret (Dichromanassa rufescens) -- This is another egret which apparently is becoming more common in the State. The first of a large number of sightings this summer was an individual seen at Cat Island on July 9. A specimen was taken at Gulfport August 7 (Clawson). On August 27 six were seen along the mainland from Bay St. Louis (where 2 were seen) to Biloxi (where one was seen). One individual was seen on a particular sand bar east of Pass Christian every time the area was visited. One individual was still at Bay St. Louis (where two were usually seen) as late as September 18 by Clawson. All the birds seen were immatures of the dark phase.

Ibis (Plegadis sp.) -- Though members of this genus were diligently searched for, only a singular observation was made. This particular individual was collected (Clawson) at Clairborne in Hancock County on September 17, 1960. Due to its being an immature bird specific identification (between Plegadis falcinellus, Glossy Ibis, and Plegadis chihi, White-faced Ibis) must await submission of the specimen to an authority.

White Ibis (Eudocimus albus) -- This species was not generally abundant on the coast, but was observed on several occasions throughout the summer. On July 11, over 180 (in several flocks of both adults and juveniles) were seen at Holly Bluff on the Jordan River in Hancock County. On August 9, 5 immature birds were observed (Clawson) at a lake in the marshes at Lakeshore. Over 500 in two flocks were seen flying east over the sound off Biloxi on the 12th of September.

Mottled Duck (Anas fulvigula) -- This duck is fairly common in the marshes around Bayou Caddy in Hancock County. It was first seen this summer on a near dry lake at Lakeshore on July 9, when 6 were seen in a single flock. During three subsequent visits (July 18, 24; August 7) the species was seen on the lake. After the August rains revitalized the lake (also watering the marshes), the species disappeared. On August 25 a roosting flight of 9 was seen over the marsh on the northeast shore of Lake Borgne at Claiborne (Williams). A careful check of the marshes in that area at sundown on September 7 revealed a flock of 6 and a flock of 5 flying to the marshes farther inland (Williams). During the next two days heavy rains filled the marshes and flooded the pastures in the area and on September 9, 23 Mottled Ducks were found feeding in the late afternoon on these flooded marsh-

pastures -- two specimens were taken (Williams). Their craws and gizzards were filled with grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, and spiders which the flood had left helpless and conspicuous on the water's surface. Several flocks of the ducks remained on the pond, gorging on their newly-found feast, until the water subsided September 12. At that time a flock of 3 was seen flying into the marsh at sundown.

Wood Duck (Aix sponsa) -- Several families raised on the freshwater lakes around Lakeshore and Bayou Caddy. Half-grown young were first seen there July 9; they could fly and thus may have hatched elsewhere. They spent the entire summer on the lakes.

Lesser Scaup (Aythya affinis) -- A pair was seen on the lakes at Lakeshore on July 9 and again on July 24. There was no evidence of an attempt to nest; they were likely the result of careless retrieving during the duck season.

Swallow-tailed Kite (Elanoides forficatus) -- Only one trip was made in search of this scarce species and we were indeed fortunate in finding it. On July 10, Mr. Herman Murrah, assistant refuge manager of the Red Creek Game Management Area, Mississippi Game and Fish Commission, guided us on a boat trip on the Pascagoula River near the Jackson-George County line. We saw a flock of 5 Swallowtails and a pair near Young's Landing in George County. An adult specimen was taken (Williams). The species has previously been reported from that section and the residents are quite familiar with it. It is not surprising that the species occurs there in light of the ideal habitat furnished by the extensive swamp along the river. It would be surprising if the species does not also occur in similar situations in Hancock and Pearl River Counties.

Mississippi Kite (Ictinia mississippiensis) -- Proving itself to be well named, this kite is a common raptore in the sections of southern Mississippi which were visited this past summer. On July 10, 18 were seen over the swamps of the Pascagoula below Young's Landing. On every visit inland several of these birds were seen along various stream bottoms.

Purple Gallinule (Porphyryla martinica) -- The weedy edges and arms of the freshwater ponds around Lakeshore hold sizeable breeding populations of this species. On July 24, 7 adults and 3 downy young were seen venturing into the open at sundown. Others were heard calling from the rank vegetation. Several individuals were seen and heard on subsequent visits (August 8, August 28).

Common Gallinule (Gallinula chloropus) -- This species lives in company with the Purple Gallinule in the ponds at Lakeshore. On July 24 two pairs were seen; one pair with 2 downy young. On August 8 an adult was seen on the pond. It is less abundant apparently than the Purple Gallinule on these ponds.

King Rail (Rallus elegans) -- Whenever the gallinule ponds around Lakeshore were visited (July 9, 24; August 7, 28) rails believed to represent this species were heard calling. Specimens were not taken, nor were any of the suspect birds seen, but if habitat and call are diagnostic these were king rails. On September 16 three of these rails were flushed (afterwards exposing themselves rather recklessly for several seconds) from a short grass marsh area at Bayou Casotte (Clawson).

American Coot (Fulica americana) -- Two Coots summered on the ponds with the gallinules (Hancock County). On July 9 one individual was seen there and again on July 24 one was seen. August 7, two were seen loafing together at the pond's edge.

Ruddy Turnstone (Arenaria interpres) -- Two mid-summer records may be of interest: one individual was seen at Bay St. Louis, June 11; another was seen on Cat Island July 9. After July 9 the species became more abundant along the mainland.

Herring Gull (Larus argentatus) -- One or more of these were seen on nearly every trip along the coast this summer. One was seen May 29 at Pascagoula (Williams); another there July 2; 3 at Biloxi and one at Ocean Springs, July 23. They became more abundant by mid-August.

Gull-billed Tern (Gelochelidon nilotica) -- This species was not uncommon around Pascagoula this summer. Several were seen feeding over the airport at Bayou Casotte on numerous occasions (May 29, 8 individuals; July 2, 5 individuals; July 3, 4 individuals; August 7, 3 individuals). They were regularly seen at Ocean Springs (3 birds, May 29; one bird, July 2; one bird, July 3; and one bird, August 7). Two nests were found in a Least Tern colony at Bayou Casotte; one nest holding a single egg was found May 29; when the colony was visited July 2, an empty egg-shell (normally pipped) was found at the site of the nest. That same day another set of empty Gull-billed Tern egg-shells (also normally hatched) were found 50 feet from the first nest -- this was a two-egg set. In both cases nest depressions could be seen near the empty shells. When the first nest was found on May 29 (Williams) two pairs of adult birds were seen in the colony. It seems likely that the nest, though not found until July 2, was active on May 29 and was overlooked by the writer. The species was common east of Biloxi during the breeding season, but the population diminished markedly during the summer. On September 11 and 12, the species was not observed there.

Least Tern (Sterna albifrons) -- A colony of nearly 500 pairs was found at Bayou Casotte on May 29 (Williams). The species bred abundantly all along the coast where the habitat was suitable. A downy juvenile was found on the beach east of Pass Christian, August 25 (Clawson).

Barn Owl (Tyto alba) -- Although this species was not actually observed, it is known to have spent considerable time on a wooded island in the marshes west of Clairborne. Numerous pellets were found (more than 20, concentrated here and there under suitable trees) as well as several secondary wing feathers. Pellets are, of course, not identifiable as to species, but Barn Owl feathers are unmistakable. The feathers were freshly dropped and some of the pellets were not more than a few days old when found September 8. There are two or three abandoned buildings on the island, making it attractive to the species.

Barn Swallow (Hirundo rustica) -- This is a common species along the Mississippi coast. Nesting colonies were found at Bayou Caddy (4 nests in a boat shed) on May 30 (Williams). There is a large colony in and around the warehouses at the port of Gulfport terminal. On July 23 over 150 nests were counted there -- most of them active.

By late August, a noticeable migration was underway along the coast. The following arrival dates may be of interest:

Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos) -- An individual (juvenile male) seen in the marshes near Clairborne on September 9 was surprisingly early for the coast.

Blue-winged Teal (Anas discors) -- An immature specimen near Bayou Caddy on August 6 seems early; it may have been a summer visitor from the breeding population in Louisiana.

Virginia Rail (Rallus limicola) -- One was seen and heard calling west of Bayou Caddy on September 7 (Williams).

Whimbrel (Numenius phaeopus) -- A specimen was taken at Gulfport (Clawson) on September 12.

Olive-sided Flycatcher (Nuttallornis borealis) -- One was seen at Lakeshore in Hancock County on August 27 (Williams).

Cliff Swallow (Petrochelidon pyrrhonota) -- On September 12 more than 400 were seen in company with over 500 Barn Swallows and nearly 100 Bank Swallows (Riparia riparia) west of Clairborne. They were feeding over the marshes and resting on telegraph wires along the railroad.

Dickcissel (Spiza americana) -- One was seen on the telegraph wire along the railroad at Claiborne on September 12.

The few specimens taken are deposited in the Museum of the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission at Jackson.

Lovett E. Williams, Jr., U. S. Coast Guard, Office of the Captain of the Port, New Orleans; and

Sterling G. Clawson, Mississippi Game and Fish Commission, Jackson

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#### Black-throated Gray Warbler

The sighting of a rare stray bird has prompted me to write you this short note so that it may be included in the next issue of notes of the Mississippi Ornithological Society. Late in the afternoon of 26 September 1960 a male Black throated gray warbler was identified by me while it was feeding in Slash pine in my backyard. The bird was seen at close range with binoculars. I attempted to contact Mrs. Ethel Floyd so that this identification could be verified, but was unable to contact her until after dark. The bird remained in the area until dusk so at dawn the following day Ethel and I sought him out. He was found in the same vicinity, but Ethel could not possibly identify him due to his being more shy and the fact that it was an overcast morning with poor light. Fortunately, the warbler was again seen that afternoon. He was actively feeding on small insects, some of which were taken on the wing after being flushed from the bark of the pines, and on green caterpillars. Ethel was contacted and on this occasion was able to confirm my identification. The bird was much less shy on this occasion and all of his plumage characteristics, even down to the yellow spots anterior to the eyes, were readily seen. He was noted the following morning (28 September), but not that afternoon or this morning, so I presume that he has passed through.

On 7 August 1960 a group of 185 White pelicans (plus or minus 5) were noted heading west to east over the beach from Gulfport to Edgewater Park. These birds were low and were clocked at 20 - 25 miles per hour by car. They were last seen in the region of the beach at Biloxi on the same course.

We have a rather steady and strong influx of Fall migrants with a rather definite "wave" on 17 September. This was two days after hurricane "Ethel." The greatest concentration of birds at this time was found at Belle Fontaine Beach. As you would anticipate, the "wave" was a mixture of migrants with the most numerous birds being Wood Pewees. There was an abundance of warblers with Hooded Warblers being most numerous. These birds showed all variations in their hoods from no demonstrable ones in females and immatures through partially formed to complete hoods. In the less developed hoods that portion over the top of the head and forehead was obscure or absent. Other warblers in diminishing frequency were Black and white, Blackburnian, Tennessee, Magnolia, and single Blue winged, Worm eating, Redstart, Ovenbird, Yellow and Louisiana water thrush. There were several other warblers which could not be positively identified. Most of these birds apparently left during the night of 17 September 1960 for the following morning they were much less numerous in this area. That night was partly cloudy and mild with a gentle northerly wind. Henry D. Haberyan, M. D., Gulfport

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U. S. Forest Service Protects Red-cockaded Woodpecker Nest Trees

P. O. Box 1291  
Jackson, Mississippi  
August 23, 1960

To: District Rangers  
From: Forest Supervisor  
Subject: Commercial Sales

The Mississippi Ornithological Society has formally requested the Forest Service for help in maintaining a suitable wildlife habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker. Formerly, it was a common species throughout the State where large pine timber was dominant over hardwoods. Today they know of only a few areas where this woodpecker is locally common and where active nesting has been observed. These areas include the Bienville Pines and the Tallahala Creek Wildlife Management Area in Jasper County. They state that the present information available indicates the bird is declining in numbers but they do not believe there is any immediate danger of extinction.

This bird has peculiar and specialized nesting habits which contribute to the danger of its extinction. It nests only in living pine trees, usually in an over-mature or "red-heart" pine. The nest cavity is excavated usually in April or May in the living tree. All around the entrance hole the birds peck small holes or even large "cat-faces" in the bark causing resin to exude from the tree around the entrance hole. Because of this habit, the nest cavity can be readily identified at any season of the year. The birds will use the same cavities for nests or may excavate new nest holes in the same tree. The birds are very social in their feeding and nesting habits, often nesting in colonies and feeding in small flocks together with nuthatches, chickadees, pine warblers, etc. They apparently disperse over wider areas during the fall and winter months, but they are nearly always found in fairly large stands of pine trees.

Effective immediately, it will be the policy on the Mississippi N. Fs. to leave those pine trees on timber sale areas which show evidence of being used as a den tree by this bird. Please see that all of your markers are informed of this policy and that they know the identifying characteristics listed in the preceding paragraph.

/s/ L. S. Newcomb  
State Supervisor  
U. S. Forest Service

The above memorandum was sent out to all District Rangers after a formal request was made on August 3, 1960, to Mr. L. S. Newcomb by Mr. John H. Phares, President, MOS, to save this woodpecker's nest trees. Formerly, it was the usual policy to mark over-mature pines for cutting, except on the 194 acres of virgin loblolly stand at the Bienville District Headquarters where only dead trees are being cut. Mr. Newcomb's letter in reply to this unusual request is as follows:

Mr. John H. Phares, President  
Mississippi Ornithological Society  
4539 Meadow Ridge  
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear Mr. Phares:

Reference is made to your letter of August 3, 1960,

The Bienville pines area consists of 194 acres surrounding the Bienville Ranger District Headquarters. For years we have followed a policy on this area of cutting only those trees which die. This policy will continue.

On other areas of National Forest land in the state of Mississippi, I have requested the District Rangers to refrain from marking individual pine trees which are identified as being inhabited by the red-cockaded woodpecker.

As I am sure you already know, National Forest lands are managed on the basis of multiple use of the many resources which they contain. We have always strived to maintain a suitable wildlife habitat for various species of birds and animals.

The intensive development and management of all of the basic renewable natural resources of the forest such as timber, water, range, recreation and wildlife is a conservation program of great significance to the continued development, prosperity, and welfare of the nation.

Very truly yours,

/s/ L. S. Newcomb  
Forest Supervisor

### Coast Observations - After Ethel

September 16 (after Ethel) we went to the Gulf Coast to the Pascagoula bridge, but there were practically no signs of damage. Only two magnificent frigate birds were seen (at Biloxi), but we were delighted to see two brown pelicans, the first seen along the Gulf Coast since October 27, 1958. (we are there only infrequently).

Amy B. Tolman

### Red-throated Loon and Western Kingbird

Lovett E. Williams, Jr., observed a Red-throated loon at Gulfport on November 28, 1960, and a Western Kingbird at Gulfport on December 9. Also, two spotted sandpipers on December 9 at Gulfport.

W. H. Turcotte observed a Western Kingbird near Money, Mississippi, in Leflore County on September 1.

### Bald Eagles on Sardis Reservoir

Two adult bald eagles were observed about December 5 by Elliott Minor and again on December 14 by Bob Towery and Harry Barkley at the same location at tall cypress trees near Clear Creek Landing on Sardis Reservoir. Messrs. Minor, Towery, and Barkley are fisheries technicians employed by the Game and Fish Commission.

### Banded White-winged Dove Record

A white-winged dove, U. S. F. W. S., No. 673-33607, banded by Texas G & F Commission, June 23, 1960, two miles east of San Fernando, Mexico, State of Tamaulipas. Recovered in exhausted condition October 17, 1960, at Biloxi, Mississippi. Reported to USFWS by Carroll E. Williams, 1513 East Howard Avenue, Biloxi.

### Eastern Ground Dove

One Eastern ground dove was observed by W. H. Turcotte about 4 miles north of Holly Bluff, Mississippi, Yazoo County, September 1, 1960.

### Christmas Count

Plans are being completed for an Audubon Christmas Bird Count for the Jackson area on December 31. The count will be conducted along the same routes used last year by Jackson members. Also, your editor has heard via the grapevine that Coast MOS and some LOS members that a Christmas count is planned for the Gulfport area.

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