

MISSISSIPPI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Mississippi New Field Check-list Published:

The Records Committee of the MOS has just received from the printer 3000 copies of the recently-revised field check list of 317 species of living birds collected or photographed in Mississippi. The 4" x 6" list uses number symbols as follows:

1. Breeding confirmed; eggs or young collected or photographed
2. Breeding noted; nest and eggs or young seen, but not confirmed
3. Largely confined to the coast
4. Rarely found in the state, or distinctly local

Families are separated by lines. Nomenclature and sequence is from the latest A. O. U. Check-list.

The new list was compiled by Erskine Gandy, Lovett E. Williams, Jr., Miss Fannye A. Cook, and W. H. Turcotte. Copies are for sale at 3¢ per copy. Order from M. O. S., 111 North Jefferson Street, Jackson 2, Mississippi.

Notes On Nesting Of Certain Coastal Birds In Mississippi

During the spring and summer of 1962, Sterling G. Clawson and I visited the islands and mainland of the Mississippi coast to band nestling waterbirds. We collected some nesting data on birds which may be of interest. In the list which follows, the Mottled Duck, Laughing Gull, Common Tern, Royal Tern, and Sandwich Tern had not previously been reported to nest in Mississippi. Of those species, only the Common Tern was a really rare nester last summer. Though already reported to nest in the State, specimens we collected of Least Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Black Skimmer, and Long-billed Marsh Wren are the first breeding specimens. Sterling and I were together on nearly every trip afield; except when otherwise stated, the following records are by both of us.

Mottled Duck (Anas fulvigula). Since first discovering the species around Claiborne in 1960, we have never failed to find it with a thorough search in that area. The residents at Ansley, Claiborne, and Lakeshore are familiar with the "French duck" and claim to see a few downy young each summer. On 22 April 1962, we tramped over the brackish marsh east of Claiborne, flushing several of the ducks but found no nest. An egg we did find, on a lump of mud without sign of nest, was fresh and when emptied showed no sign of embryonic development. On 1 July 1962, by pure chance we flushed a Mottled Duck from the grass at Lakeshore as we stepped from the car. Inspection of the spot revealed a neatly-constructed nest of marsh grass and sedges lined with breast feathers and containing seven nearly white eggs. One egg was taken for the State museum that day and later, when the duck abandoned the nest, the rest of the clutch was taken. Bill Turcotte emptied the eggs and informed me that only one of the eggs showed any embryonic development.

Common Gallinule (Gallinula chloropus). The Common Gallinule is a permanent resident in the Lakeshore-Claiborne marshes. We saw downy young at Lakeshore in 1960. On 6 May 1962, Sterling Clawson, Mac Myers, and I checked a clump of bull rushes at Claiborne where we suspected the gallinules were nesting and found a nest with two unincubated eggs. The eggs were taken for the Game Commission museum.

Laughing Gull (Larus atricilla). During a conversation concerning our banding activities on Gulf Island National Wildlife Refuge last summer, John Walther, the refuge manager, told Clawson and me of a colony of gulls and terns on Petit Bois National Wildlife Refuge which contained, among other species, a large number of Laughing Gulls. On 24 June we were joined by Robert W. Skinner of Montgomery on a banding excursion to Petit Bois. We estimated the gull colony to contain approximately 3,000 pairs spread over about 50 acres near the western end of the island. We soon found that the young gulls could not be caught in the thick growth of sea oats in large enough numbers to make banding worthwhile so we spent most of the day banding in the tern colony nearby on the beach. On 30 June we met Dr. Henry D. Haberyan and John Walther for a banding visit to the islands and again banded very few gulls, but we did pick up several abandoned eggs of Laughing Gull to authenticate their breeding. When we last visited the colony, on 18 July, with Mac Myers of New Orleans, the first of the year's gull hatch was flying while many fresh eggs were still in the nests.

Gull-billed Tern (Gelochelidon nilotica). At least eleven pairs of Gull-billed Terns nested (not all successfully) last summer in a skimmer-tern colony between the mouths of the Pascagoula River. The species had been reported to nest in this area previously. But a set of eggs we collected there on 4 June is the first breeding specimen for the State. None nested in 1962 on the flat east of Pascagoula where two nests were found and reported (MOS Newsletter 5(4):1-5) in 1960.

Common Tern (Sterna hirundo). The Common Tern is a very rare nester anywhere on the Gulf of Mexico, in fact, I know of only two other reports. Finding a pair nesting in the skimmer-tern colony between the mouths of the Pascagoula River (about one mile west of the town of Pascagoula) was a distinct surprise for Clawson, Haberyan, and me on 14 July, 1962. My attention was first attracted to the pair by their persistent prolonged low screeching, only faintly audible over the constant yapping of about 200 Black Skimmer residents of the colony. I quickly recognized the two gray-breasted, orange-billed terns as breeding plumaged Commons, but considered it only the slightest possibility that they were nesting there. But their plumage and behavior so strongly suggested it that I backed away to give the birds a chance to settle on their nest. Immediately one of the

Common Terns dropped beside a nest for a brief inspection, and took wing again. Clawson, Haberyan, and I watched the adults direct their attention toward the nest for several minutes. Finally one of the terns settled and incubated the two eggs for twelve minutes before we frightened it away as we approached the nest to take photographs. The eggs were not readily distinguishable from those of the Forster's Tern, but the nest itself was distinct from a Forster's nest in that it was 120 feet from the nearest marsh vegetation (or vegetation of any kind) on sand and contained not one sprig of vegetal matter in its construction. (During our frequent visits to the colony last summer, not a single Forster's Tern was seen. As yet, there is no record of the Forster's ever nesting in Mississippi.)

When the nest was discovered on 14 July, one of the two eggs was pipping. I hatched the young tern by hand and took the empty shell as a specimen. On 18 July we revisited the nest with Mac Myers and banded the young tern I had hatched. The second egg did not hatch. On both visits, we took numerous photographs, including several comparing the Common Tern eggs with Gull-billed Tern eggs. Some of these photographs are deposited in the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission Museum at Jackson.

Least Tern (*Sterna albifrons*). The Least Tern nests abundantly on the Mississippi coast wherever it can find a suitable place for its nest. In 1960 we reported a large colony east of Pascagoula at Bayou Casotte. The colony contained about 400 pairs and was on the bare ground of a recent fill. As the weedy vegetation took hold in 1960, the area became unsuitable for tern nesting and in 1961 held very few nests. No terns nested there in the summer of 1962 -- it appears that most of that colony moved into the area between the mouths of the Pascagoula River. The later colony contained around 100 nests in 1961 and increased to over 400 active nests during the summer of 1962, outsizing by far any other Least Tern colony in Mississippi. Clawson and I banded over 400 young Least Terns in the Pascagoula colony last summer.

Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*). About 500 pairs of Royal Terns nested on Petit Bois Island Refuge last summer in a mixed colony with Sandwich Terns. We banded a few young on each visit (24 and 30 June, 18 July), for a total of over 300. We took two addled eggs for the State museum in Jackson on 30 June.

Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*). The tern colony of Petit Bois held approximately 2,500 nests of the Sandwich Tern. We banded some each time we visited the island for a total of over 1,400 during the summer. On 30 June we carried with us several addled eggs as evidence of their nesting in Mississippi.

Black Skimmer (*Rynchops nigra*). For several years the Black Skimmer has been known to nest in Mississippi, mainly in the colony between the mouths of the Pascagoula River. This year that colony held about 150 pairs of skimmers. On 4 June we took a set of eggs for the Game and Fish Commission museum. The only other colony we know of in Mississippi is a smaller one (50 pairs on 18 July) near the western end of Petit Bois Island. Skimmers are later nesting than other sea birds in Mississippi -- the first to hatch in the Pascagoula colony were pipping on 4 June.

Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*). Apparently there is no definite report of the Fish Crow nesting in Mississippi, though there is no doubt that it has done so for many years. On 12 May we found seven active nests at Pass Christian and another at Bayou Casotte on 4 June. The eight nests were high in tall pines and we were not able to secure a specimen.

Long-billed Marsh Wren (Thelmatodytes palustris). The marsh wren, like the Fish Crow, is a regular element in the birdlife of coastal Mississippi at all seasons, but there is no report of its nesting or breeding specimens. From a thriving population of these birds between the mouths of the Pascagoula River, we took a nest with one egg on 12 May and on 23 June we collected another nest with four eggs.

Seaside Sparrow (Ammospiza maritima). This bird nests abundantly with the marsh wrens near Pascagoula. Strangely, though, it is scarce elsewhere on the coast of Mississippi. We found nests at Pascagoula in the summer of 1961 and again in 1962. Henry Haberyan and I found one nest containing one egg there on 23 June 1962. We noted a somewhat sparse population at Claiborne during May but did not find a nest.

All specimens taken were for the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission museum at Jackson, Lovett E. Williams, Jr., Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, P. O. Box 908, Lake City, Florida.

Mississippi Kites

On May 27 (Berry) three Mississippi Kites were seen over Pearl River swamp along the Natchez Trace. On June 17 and 19 four were seen again near the same location (Madison County) by Christine Berry and Mrs. William G. Wills, Jr.

On June 24, seven Mississippi Kites were observed along the Mississippi River at Grand Gulf, Claiborne County, Mississippi. Christine Berry, 3918 North State Street, Jackson, Mississippi.

Louisiana Waterthrush Nestling

On May 27, 1962, at Rose's Bluff on the Natchez Trace north of Jackson, Mississippi (Madison County), we saw a Louisiana waterthrush nestling just out of the nest. An adult with food was nearby. Christine Berry and Mrs. William G. Wills, Jr., Jackson, Mississippi.

Jaeger at Bay St. Louis

In the beginning of June, 1962, I found a Jaeger by the railroad trestle spanning the Bay of St. Louis. Under the circumstances, collection was impossible. Buford (Mac) Myers, 2104 General Pershing Street, New Orleans 15, Louisiana.

King Eider Collected at Pascagoula, Mississippi

During the 1960-61 annual duck wing survey conducted by Mr. Sam Carney, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and reported by him, the wing of a King Eider, Somateria spectabilis, was obtained from a bird killed by a hunter, Mr. L. M. Brister, on December 17, 1960, at Pascagoula, Mississippi. The identification was made by Roxie C. Laybourne, Acting Director, Bird and Mammal Laboratories, Branch of Research, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C., and concurred in by Thomas D. Burleigh. The eider wing is in the duck wing survey

collection, Patuxent Research Center, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Laurel, Maryland.

A request has been made to have the wing placed in the Wildlife Museum in Jackson, Mississippi. Reported by B. E. Gandy, 111 North Jefferson Street, Jackson, Mississippi.

Glossy Ibis Records for Hancock County, Mississippi, Confirmed

A specimen of the glossy ibis, Plegadis falcinellus, was collected by Sterling G. Clawson on May 4, 1962, at Lakeshore in Hancock County, Mississippi. Earlier (on September 17, 1960, MOS Newsletter, Vol. 5, No. 4), Clawson collected an immature specimen of a Plegadis species at Claiborne, Hancock County. Both the above specimens were sent to the Bird and Mammal Laboratories, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C., where the identifications were made by comparisons by Roxie C. Laybourne. The immature specimen collected on September 17, 1960, was identified as Plegadis chihi, and the other specimen as falcinellus. Reported by B. E. Gandy, 111 North Jefferson Street, Jackson, Mississippi.

Spring and Summer Gulf Coast Notes

Two attle egrets, Ardeola ibis, appeared in the cow pasture of a farm near Lyman, Mississippi, on 25 April. It had been my hope that these birds would nest in the vicinity, although neither showed much change into breeding plumage, but they departed 6 May and were not seen subsequently.

A single Loggerhead shrike, Lanius ludovicianus, was banded at the U. S. Fish Hatchery at Lyman on 31 August 1961. A banded bird of this species seen at the fish hatchery 4 May 1962 is presumed to be the same bird.

The first egg of the Least tern, Sterna albifrons, for this year was noted on 5 May.

A Stilt sandpiper, Micropalama himantopus, was netted and banded at Gulfport 9 May 1962. This is one of the rarer shorebirds of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The banded bird was in full breeding plumage. On the basis of measurements, it was thought to be a female.

Brown pelicans, Pelecanus occidentalis, are more uncommon than the White pelican, Pelecanus erythrorhynchos. The former are seen at infrequent intervals and usually singly whereas the latter numbering from 1 to 31 can be seen almost any day at the mouth of the Pascagoula River. White pelicans are supposed to be at their lowest numbers here during the summer.

Although not seen in Mississippi, two Sooty terns, Sterna fuscata, in the Chandeleur Islands the weekend of 2-3 June are not too far from our coast. A Marbled godwit, Limosa fedoa, seen on this trip on 2 June probably represents a late Spring date for this species in Louisiana.

Gull-billed terns, Gelochelidon nilotica, are nesting on the mainland on the Pascagoula River flats. To date 5 nestlings have been banded and several nests with eggs are still present. A nesting of Common terns (single nest), Sterna hirundo, is also present here. The latter nesting was noted by Lovett Williams on 14 July and confirmed by Sterling Clawson and myself. Three Lesser yellowlegs,

Totonus flavipes, in this same area is a somewhat unusual number for this time of year.

Two immature White ibis, Guara alba, appeared at the U. S. Fish Hatchery 4 July. They were netted and banded the weekend of 7-8 July and from their appearance, especially that of the bill, would appear to have been about 3 months old. Two additional immature White ibis have appeared in the past week at the hatchery, but I haven't had an opportunity to try and capture them as yet. Dr. Henry D. Haberyan, 13 Poplar Circle, Gulfport, Mississippi

Field Notes Important! Send Them In

Notes on field observations of the type reported in this and past issues of the MOS Newsletter are proving to be of considerable value to the ornithology of Mississippi. Records published in the MOS Newsletter are being used in the compilation of data for an annotated check list of Mississippi birds. B. E. Gandy, Director of the Wildlife Museum in Jackson, is preparing card files by species from published data on Mississippi birds. He is currently working on compilation of card records from the MOS Newsletters and requests that members continue to send in notes on their observations for publication in the Newsletter.

The new field check list has been revised to show what birds have been recorded in Mississippi and should stimulate efforts to add new species by collection. Breeding records are needed also on several species.
