

MISSISSIPPI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Organized April 30, 1955

MRS. W. G. WILLS, JR.	DR. HENRY D. HABERYAN	ERSKINE GANDY
Vice-President	President	Treasurer
1521 Poplar	13 Poplar Circle	261 Woodie Drive
Jackson, Mississippi	Gulfport, Mississippi	Jackson, Mississippi

WILLIAM H. TURCOTTE
Editor
Route 2, Box 39
Jackson, Mississippi

June 5, 1963

MOS NEWSLETTER - Vol. 8, No. 3 Compiled by: W. H. TURCOTTE
Annual MOS Meeting

The annual MOS Meeting was held at Gulfport and Belle Fontaine Beach on April 19 and 20. Dr. and Mrs. Haberyan welcomed members and guests at their home in Gulfport, Friday night. Saturday morning and afternoon were spent afield at Belle Fontaine Beach with headquarters at Dr. and Mrs. Floyd's cabin and on the Pascagoula River flats. Mist-netting demonstrations by Mrs. Floyd and Dr. Haberyan proved interesting. Both netting and birding for land birds was a bit slow due to good weather conditions that permitted their passage inland. Mrs. Floyd was successful in netting both color phases of the screech owl Friday and the group enjoyed them very much while they were photographed and released. The netting and banding of shorebirds on the Flats proved interesting. Dr. Haberyan set up and operated several nets around the shallow water pools in this area. Dowitchers, dunlins, other sandpipers, semi-palmated plovers and thick billed plovers were caught and banded by Dr. Haberyan. Members during the day recorded over ninety (90) birds on the coast. The highlight of the day's observations was seeing several Long-billed curlews and whimbrels together with other shorebirds and waders on the tidal mudflats near the mouth of the East Pascagoula River.

The business meeting was held Saturday night at the Friendship House.

Four Hours on Horn Island - 23 May 1963

On 23 May 1963 through the courtesy of Mr. Kent Meyers and his coworkers of the Gulf Island National Wildlife Refuge, I was able to visit Horn Island, Mississippi. Observations on this trip may prove of interest to readers of MOS Newsletter.

Horn Island is approximately 14.4 miles long. It varies in width from slightly less than one-quarter mile to slightly more than 0.8 mile. It is separated from the mainland (Jackson County) by Mississippi Sound which varies in width here from slightly over 6 miles to 8.5 miles.

During the early morning hours of 23 May a cold front passed through this area so that cool northeasterly winds of 10 - 15 m. p. h. helped relieve the heat even of mid-day.

We left Point Cadet (Biloxi) about 7:30 A. M., in an LCM loaded with fencing to be used in building up sand dunes on the island. On the exposed sand bars in Biloxi Bay, Black skimmers could be seen resting with "peeps" unidentifiable from the boat scampering near the small waves. Coursing low over the water were occasional Barn swallows. Most of these were identifiable as our local insularis race by their very pale underparts. These birds probably nest under the Biloxi Bay bridge. The larger markers were carefully observed to see if these swallows showed any interest in them as nesting sites. They did not, but on the return trip from the island female Purple martins were showing an interest in these markers, specifically numbers 36 and 42.

A few Laughing gulls accompanied the boat off and on during the trip to and from the island. Least, Royal, and Forster's terns could be seen feeding in Mississippi Sound and Ring-billed and Herring gulls were present in small numbers in the area. Bonaparte's gulls, which had not been as numerous this past winter as in previous years, had long since departed our shores.

A single Common loon and about three-fourths in its summer plumage was preening itself as we approached the island's beach and a Red-breasted merganser hurriedly flew along near the beach. Scattered along the beach itself were Semipalmated and Spotted sandpipers and Thick-billed (Wilson's) plovers as well as a few Ruddy turnstones. Later in the day I was to see 3 adult and 2 flightless young Snowy plovers on the seaward beaches. One of these young was banded. The other proved to be too fleet of foot for capture. The most abundant shorebird was the Sanderling.

Horn Island presents a limited variety of habitats for birds. In addition to the white sand beaches with their wonderfully clear waters, there are a few brackish-water lagoons. The island has large areas covered by slash pine. There is scant undergrowth of wax myrtle, saw palmetto and yucca. The island is apparently burned over at intervals accounting for the paucity of undergrowth. This produces an almost park-like atmosphere. I noted only one small live oak during my short time on the island, but, of course, was able to cover only a limited area of the island.

Along the margins of the lagoons were several Green heron and a little blue heron. No nests of these or related species were seen. Red-winged blackbirds and Boat-tailed grackles nest in growths of the marshy margins of the lagoons. Several, just-flying grackles were about. Two occupied Osprey nests were noted. One of these is located about 100 yards from a small cottage being erected for the refuge workers. No young could be seen in this nest in the summit of a dead pine. One adult remained closely on it suggesting the presence of eggs or young too small to be observable from the ground.

Colonial and semi-colonial, ground nesting birds such as terns and the Laughing gull cannot use Horn Island successfully for nesting as they do neighboring Petit Bois and Ship Islands because of the presence of pigs roaming freely over the island. "Rooting" areas of these pigs were numerous over the island.

Probably the most numerous species on the island was the Common nighthawk. These flushed from underfoot in all wooded areas traversed, were abundant lengthwise on the limbs of the pines, and could be seen in numbers in the air at all times. These birds showed remarkably little fear of the presence of man. I was consistently able to approach within 6 to 8 feet of them. This lack of fear was also noticeable in some of the other species present, particularly the very abundant Eastern kingbirds and the less numerous Yellow-billed cuckoos.

Mockingbirds were scattered sparsely throughout the wooded parts of the island. Six Red-headed woodpeckers were the only representatives of this family of birds found. Only two Blue jays were seen. Three Loggerhead shrikes were noted.

Other land birds found consisted of four Mourning doves, a single Great-crested flycatcher, several Barn swallows, a single male Purple martin, six Bobolink and three Orchard orioles.

The most exciting feature of the trip was the finding of a Gray kingbird about one-half mile east of the refuge cottage. I have long suspected that this species might occur on the island, but have previously had no opportunities to visit the island. I am familiar with the Gray kingbird from Santa Rosa island near Pensacola, Florida. It is not infrequently reported on Dauphin Island, Alabama. MOS Newsletter readers will recall that Lovett Williams and Sterling Clawson added this species to the list of Mississippi birds by collecting a specimen on the adjacent mainland (Belle Fontaine Beach) on 28 April 1962. The present sighting consequently represents a second record for Mississippi. Only one bird was found and it showed no predilection for the area so there was no suggestion of nesting. It was not collected since last year's specimen rests in the Mississippi Wildlife Museum in Jackson. I am not sure whether or not the present bird was outside that portion of Horn Island making up the refuge.

A birding trip to Horn Island is well worth one's time. Permission must, of course, be obtained from Mr. Kent Meyers, Manager, Gulf Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Biloxi, Mississippi. Transportation to and from the island is a problem and one must wear protective clothing and take other precautions from the sun and insects.

A list of birds seen on and from Horn Island (23 May 1963) follows:

Common loon
Green heron
Little blue heron
Red-breasted merganser
Osprey
Snowy plover
Thick-billed plover
Black-bellied plover
Ruddy turnstone
Spotted sandpiper
Semipalmated sandpiper
Sanderling
Laughing gull
Least tern
Royal tern
Mourning dove

Yellow-billed cuckoo
Common nighthawk
Red-headed woodpecker
Eastern kingbird
Gray kingbird
Great-crested flycatcher
Barn swallow
Purple martin
Blue jay
Mockingbird
Loggerhead shrike
Bobolink
Red-winged blackbird
Orchard oriole
Boat-tailed grackle

Additional species noted during the passage to and from the island include:

Herring gull
Ring-billed gull

Forster's tern
Black skimmer

Dr. H. Haberyan
2214 Seventeenth Street
Lake Charles, Louisiana

Worm-eating Warbler Breeding Record

On May 25, 1963, about four miles northwest of Bovina (Warren County), Mississippi, in the loess bluff hills along Clear Creek a female worm-eating warbler was

observed carrying food and in the act of feeding a fledgling young out of the nest and capable of short flight. A male was first heard and seen singing near the site where the fledgling was found in a deep ravine, one slope of which was an almost pure stand of beech trees with understory vegetation including Magnolia, the oak-leaf hydrangea and wild hydrangea (*H. arborescens*), and there was a dense canebrake at the bottom of the ravine along a small stream course. After watching the male on the bluff for about ten minutes the activity of a small bird visiting around the same spot was noticed in the bottom of the ravine. On closer approach a worm-eating warbler was seen carrying food and went to the spot where the young bird was located in the ground cover. Thinking it was feeding young in the nest I approached the site and the fledgling arose and flew a short distance away. The adult returned to the same spot a few minutes later with a large insect larva, searched the area, then called and the fledgling answered about 15 yards away and immediately flew toward the fledgling's call, disappeared from view momentarily in the understory vegetation and reappeared without the food after apparently having fed its young. A search was made for the young bird but it could not be located again although the adult(s) returned to the vicinity several times.

Dale Caldwell and Edgar Grissom, Millsaps College students who have recently conducted studies of the bird and small mammal life in this area, accompanied me during part of these observations. Edgar Grissom observed the singing male and Dale Caldwell observed the worm-eating warbler carrying food. Both had previously recorded these warblers this spring and had reported singing males persistently and frequently seen in the same territories and they had previously reported the possibility of breeding activity at this location.

Dale Caldwell discovered a Kentucky warbler nest containing four incubated eggs in a clump of vegetation nearby where the fledgling worm-eating warbler was seen. The basal part of the nest was composed of large cane leaves. A Swainson's warbler was heard at this location; also, a Louisiana waterthrush. Hooded warblers were seen and heard at this location and were numerous at other stops in the woodlands in this area. Redstarts were heard at several locations, especially along the Clear Creek bottom, but no nesting activity was seen.

The above observation probably constitutes the only Mississippi breeding record for the worm-eating warbler although birds have been observed previously during the assumed nesting period and showing signs of breeding activity along the loess bluff region in Wilkinson, Warren, and Yazoo Counties by this and other observers. W. H. Turcotte

Gulf Coast Notes - May 24, 1963

MOS members seeing the Long-billed curlews on the Pascagoula "flats" will be interested to learn that the species remained as late as 10 April 1963.* The Whimbrels (Hudsonian curlews) have remained there, one being seen as late as 22 May 1963. On the same date a single Knot was seen there. Also, so noted were about 20 Sandwich (Cabot's) terns. These are uncommon on the mainland. One usually encounters them on the bouys and in the air about half way out to the off-shore islands. Two Common terns were also seen. They were still in winter plumage so there was no evidence of an interest in nesting on their part.

Least terns appeared in Gulfport on April 14 this year which is somewhat late. They were numerous along the beach by the 17th. Nesting sites (many with eggs) were noted May 9, but eggs, no doubt, were present earlier for 18 egg-containing nests were found that date. The first hatched young were found May 22.

*Editor's Note: Reference should be 10 May 1963, since MOS Meeting was April 20-21, 1963.

The first Black skimmer egg of the year was found May 22.

Six White pelicans were noted in the Pascagoula River mouth region 17 April 1963.

Eight Cattle egrets were seen in a pasture just south of the Gulfport Municipal Airport on April 27. One was still there on the 29th.

We had no real "precipitations" of trans-Gulf migrants this spring here on the coast. The best single day of netting of passerines I had was April 12.

H. Haberyan, M. D.
2214 Seventeenth Street
Lake Charles, Louisiana

Purple Finches at Gulfport - February 13, 1963

My wife, Gussie, saw a Purple finch, Carpodacus purpureus purpureus, a male, in our backyard February 13. Although I didn't see this bird I am confident that the identification is correct for Ethel Floyd saw one in her yard later in the day and a local resident saw three birds which were rather accurately described as this species the same period. I have never seen this species this far South. I haven't checked Burleigh's records, but believe he doesn't mention this species.

H. Haberyan, M. D.

Natchez's Nighthawk*

Editor's Note: Mr. Orrick Metcalfe sends the following observation:

Dear Mr. Turcotte:

A week or so ago Miss Fannye Cook was in Natchez. In driving around I showed her a night hawk who spends the daylight hours perched on a telephone cable which crosses one of our busiest thoroughfares. She suggested that I drop you a note as you might want to mention this in the Ornithological Society Newsletter.

I first noticed this bird in June of last year. It seemed very unusual to see a bird spending so many of the daylight hours perched immediately above a street on which hundreds of cars pass each day. He left in the late summer and much to our surprise returned to his same perch the early part of this May. The vast majority of the time his head is facing South.

Sincerely,
/s/ Orrick Metcalfe

A Checklist of the Birds of the Loess Hills of Warren County, C. E. Grissom, J. E. Ballew, R. D. Caldwell, and R. E. Bell. Millsap's College, Jackson, Mississippi: Editor's Review

An unpublished paper as titled above was submitted for review and comment for the Newsletter by C. E. Grissom and R. D. Caldwell. Copies were also made available to the Wildlife Museum. The text contains comments and observations on birds of this highly interesting region and is summarized by the authors as follows:

"In summary 104 species representing 32 families were identified. Details of the circumstances of record are provided for each species.

"The Bluff Forest area is of special ornithological interest for two reasons. First, because of its central location in the state. Extensive studies are being conducted in North and South Mississippi but complete knowledge of the birds of Mississippi will not be possible until studies are conducted in central Mississippi. The second special interest is that Bluff Forest provides an opportunity to study birds of questionable status. Two such species are the Worm-eating Warbler and Scarlet Tanager. In general, Bluff Forest supports a large and diverse bird population."

The paper reports on a study of the area, done under a research grant, by the above-named students under the direction of Millsaps College's Biology Department. The 10-square mile area studied lies north of Highway 80 north of Bovina, Mississippi, and includes the Bluff Experimental Forest. The study was initiated in November, 1962, and ended May 10, 1963. Vegetation is described for the area. A checklist of 104 species of birds identified by sight contains brief comments and observation dates for each species. Observations with recorded dates of nests with eggs or young, nest construction and other observations or fledglings with adults substantiate the following breeding observations:

Broadwinged Hawk - May 10, 1963, nest in sweetgum 50 ' up

Hairy Woodpecker - April 17, 1963 - active nest

Downy Woodpecker - May 3, 1963 - active nest

Acadian Flycatcher - May 3, 1963 - nest building on beech limb

Rough-winged Swallow - April 12, 1963 - nesting in roadside bluff cut

Tufted Titmouse - May 10, 1963 - adult feeding fledglings

Carolina Wren (No dates) - Nests among tree roots in sides of bluffs

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - April 12, 1963 - nest 40' up on large oak limb

Loggerhead Shrike - April 12, 1963 - nest 12 ft. up in hackberry in pasture

Black-and-white Warbler - April 19, 1963 - nest with 6 eggs on ground on top of bluff (Nest and eggs photographed and nest collected and deposited in Wildlife Museum)

Worm-eating Warbler - Although no actual breeding was observed, territorial singing males (at least ten in different areas) were observed to indicate possible breeding and so recorded.

Kentucky Warbler - recorded as singing males and in pairs during May abundantly (Subsequent to study Dale Caldwell found a nest with 4 incubated eggs and recorded elsewhere in this issue of MOS Newsletter.)

American Redstart - Although no evidence of breeding was found it was noted as a bird possibly breeding in this area.

Orchard Oriole - May 3, 1963, active nest 12' up in pecan tree in pasture beside road.

Scarlet Tanager - This species was noted by R. D. Caldwell: June 1959 and on April 12 and 20, 1963. The authors suspect that it might be found to nest sparingly (although a single late observation seems inadequate on which to base a surmise). The authors probably erroneously list seven species of woodpeckers as nesting species, not including the Red-cockaded Cockaded which was

found absent in the area. Although the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is listed as a nesting bird, no dates, observations or records are reported to indicate any breeding status. All other six of the woodpeckers were recorded as permanent residents in the area.

This local checklist is a worthwhile contribution especially the actual nesting records established for the Black-and-white warbler and the observations on breeding activity for worm-eating warblers in this area. The young men responsible are to be commended for their study.

MOS Members Participate in Migration Study

Several MOS members cooperated in the telescopic migration study of the Gulf Coast Area, which was conducted by L. S. U. Museum of Zoology during April and May. At the peak of this study on May 4-5, observation stations were in operation on the Yucatan Peninsula, on the Bay Island of Honduras, on the coast of Campeche, and on several offshore oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. Mobile short-range radars cruised the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico gathering data to compare with the telescopic stations.

MOS members manned stations at Jackson and at two localities on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Jackson members "moon watched" from 8:15 P. M., on May 4, to 3:00 A. M., May 5. The peak in Jackson occurred between 11:30 and 12:30 P. M., when about 60 birds per hour were observed crossing the face of the moon. There was a gradual build-up in numbers from 8:15 until the peak was reached, then a gradual decline followed by a rapid decline during the last hour of the watch. About 30 birds were observed during the first hour of observation and about 6 during the last hour.

Jackson MOS members participating in the study were: Miss Christine Berry, Mrs. W. G. Wills, W. H. Turcotte, and B. E. Gandy. Those who observed at the coastal stations were headed by Dr. H. D. Haberyan and Mrs. Ethel Floyd.

B. E. Gandy, Jackson, Mississippi

MOS Officers Nominated

Nominations by the Committee for Officers for the current year are as follows:

President - Miss Fannye A. Cook, Crystal Springs
Vice-President - Mrs. C. Hal Cleveland, Mississippi City
Regional Vice-President - Mr. Orrick Metcalf, Natchez, Mississippi
Secretary-Treasurer - Erskine Gandy, Jackson
Editor - W. H. Turcotte, Jackson

Since a quorum was not present for election of officers at the annual meeting, Mr. Erskine Gandy, Acting Secretary for the MOS, will poll the voting membership by mail. Any active member desiring to make additional nominations for any of the above offices should notify Mr. Gandy right away. WHT

Indigo Bunting Nest

The writer observed and photographed an indigo bunting nest containing four newly-hatched young situated in a large clump of dock weed (Rumex sp.) on the shoulder of a county road in Sharkey County about seven miles south-east of Rolling Fork, Mississippi. The adult female was seen at close range feeding the young and cleaning out the nest. This observation was made on May 27, 1963. W. H. Turcotte

#####