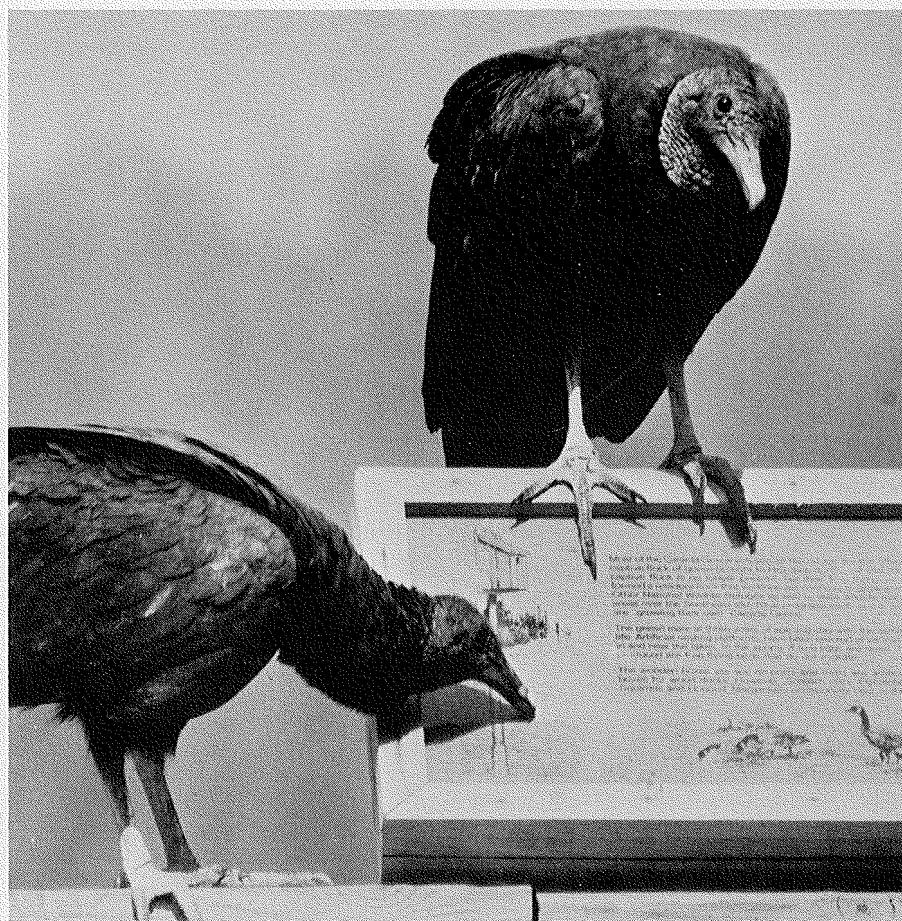


THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Vol. 13 (1)

July 1983



A Periodical Published by the Mississippi Ornithological Society
to Record and Further the Study of Mississippi Birdlife

Vol. 13, No. 1

July 1983

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Front Cover: Black Vultures "learning" about the Canada Geese at Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge. (Photo by J.A. Jackson)	

Black Vultures Kill Skunk in Mississippi

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Many references to the food of Black Vultures (Coragyps atratus) mention occasional attacks on animals. However, specific instances of such attacks are rarely described. Black Vultures have been seen attacking domestic chicks, newborn calves, kids, piglets, lambs, turtles, opossums, and skunks (Figgins 1923, Sprunt 1946, Lovell 1947, Roads 1936, Hagopian 1947, Hamilton 1941, Mrosovsky 1971, McIlhenny 1939).

On 15 March 1983, while driving with Terry L. Vandeventer south of Clinton, Mississippi, on the Natchez Trace Parkway, I noticed a full grown skunk (Mephitis mephitis) moving leisurely across a recently mowed field which also contained about 12 cows. Since it is common to see skunks at almost any time of day in grassy fields as they search for insects, I might not normally have taken notice. However, this skunk was surrounded by about 10 Black Vultures.

The vultures were on the ground and encircled the skunk, remaining about 5 m from it. We approached the group on foot and the vultures hopped away a short distance, although none left or retreated very far. The skunk appeared to be undisturbed and continued eating insects. As soon as we got back into our car, the vultures returned to their positions surrounding the skunk. We then left, but returned within 45 minutes, at which time we found the vultures devouring the skunk. The respectable skunk odor prevented close inspection!

McIlhenny (1939) reported Black Vulture predation on skunks, noting "...as soon as eight or ten [Black Vultures] have assembled, one will attack the skunk from the side. The skunk usually discharges its musk as soon as it is attacked, and this seems to be the signal for a general attack by the assembled vultures, and they will quickly kill and eat it." He also witnessed similar attacks on opossums. McIlhenny associated the attacks he observed with prolonged dry weather; our weather had not been particularly dry.

After this instance, I attempted to learn whether such attacks are common in this area. Neighboring farmers have not seen any predation on skunks, but have witnessed similar attacks on piglets on many occasions. Throughout the literature, in most instances the presence of the placentae near the newborn pigs appears to have been the original attraction for the birds. This does not, however, account for all instances of predation by Black Vultures.

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Nesting of the American Coot at Noxubee National Wildlife
Refuge, Mississippi

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On 28 May 1983, JRW observed an American Coot (Fulica americana) with three half-grown young near the spillway at Bluff Lake, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Noxubee County, Mississippi. JAJ found an adult with 2 half-grown young in the same area on 31 May. At that time the birds were within a dense stand of cattails and it is possible that a third chick was present.

These observations represent the first nesting record for American Coots in Mississippi. The initiation and success of the effort was almost certainly due to the closed fishing season on Bluff Lake and the extensive emergent vegetation that resulted from the breaching of the dam by flood waters in April of 1979.

Summer records of American Coots have been reported with increasing frequency in Mississippi in recent years. Gandy and Turcotte (1970) list only May records from Hinds, Warren, and Lafayette counties. At the Hattiesburg sewage lagoons, Larry Gates and Terrie Fairley found up to eight coots that remained through the summers of 1976-1980 (Jackson and Weber 1976, Jackson and Cooley 1978, Jackson 1979, Jackson 1981). Wayne Weber found up to eight American Coots at the Pascagoula River marsh, Jackson Co., in June 1977 (Weber and Jackson 1977), and four there in June and July 1978 (Jackson and Cooley 1978). Weber found two at Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, Washington Co., in June 1978 (Jackson and Cooley 1978). The only previous "summer" record for Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge was of two coots seen on 3 September 1977 by Weber (Weber and Jackson 1977).

In Alabama and Louisiana, the species is reported as uncommon in summer and rarely breeding, although summer records have come from throughout both states (Imhof 1976, Lowery 1974).

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Migrating White Pelicans Over Hattiesburg

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White Pelicans (Pelecanus erythrorhynchos) have been reported from various inland localities in Mississippi, but most of those records have been for flocks of fewer than 12 birds. Some of the largest groups have come from the Hattiesburg area. Larry Gates (Weber and Jackson 1977) reported 150 from the Hattiesburg sewage lagoons on 18 April 1977. They were gone the following day. Gates and Terrie Fairley listed 39 for 22 and 23 October 1980 (Jackson and Schardien 1980). Irby observed 18 on 6 March 1982 at Lake Serene, about 6 km west of Hattiesburg. A western front had brought stormy conditions the previous night. The White Pelicans were gone the following morning.

A flock conservatively estimated to include 250 White Pelicans was observed by Moore and Rodriguez near Hattiesburg on 2 May 1982 at 1600. The weather was clear and the birds were observed for some distance through a 22 X telescope as they flew northwest along the Leaf River flood plain. Their reversed V formation included three chevrons equidistant from each other as in the insignia for a sergeant's rank. The rear chevron had shifting (1 to 3) lines extending straight back. A continual exchange of birds occurred among the various echelons and the lines. This flock, when east of Hattiesburg, turned west, passing over the Hattiesburg sewage lagoons and continuing beyond telescope range.

The number of White Pelicans sighted by various observers near Hattiesburg and the Leaf River flood plain provides some evidence that this area is within a flyway used in their migration.

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- Jackson, J.A., and B.J. Schardien. 1980. Birds around the state: August 1979-May 1980. Miss. Kite 10:10-20.
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REVIEWS

Wilson, Ron, and Pat Lee. *The Marshland World*. Blandford Press. Poole, Dorset, England. viii + 152 pp. \$17.95.

Marshes and swamps are often seen, by most people, as foreign, drab, and uninviting places. For this reason few people venture out into them to see the wide variety of plants and animals which inhabit these wet worlds. Ron Wilson and Pat Lee have done a fine job of introducing the colorful and interesting plants and animals of European marsh habitats. Although this book is concerned largely with British marshes, many parallels may be drawn with similar areas around the world.

Following a brief introduction, the book is divided into three parts: man's historical and continued use of marsh plants and animals, the common marshland vegetation, and the common marshland animals. In each section, mention is made of man's past and present influence. Animals considered include invertebrates, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. The coverage of birds includes a brief account of the feeding and nesting activities of each species. Consideration is given to those birds inhabiting the marsh, as well as those that just visit the marsh, but live in peripheral habitats.

The book is filled with beautiful color photographs of the common species of organisms considered. Although the accounts of some organisms are brief and occasional errors occur, the book provides a good overview of marshland life for the casual reader. The reader may, however, be confronted with unfamiliar European terms, particularly in the first part. Overall, "The Marshland World" provides a good introduction to a commonly overlooked habitat.--Mark LaSalle.

Sutton, George M. 1980. *Bird Student*. University of Texas Press, Austin. 216 pp, 9 color plates, several black-and-white plates. \$15.95.

I first met George Sutton several years ago when I was a graduate student studying geographic variation in woodpeckers. I had the good fortune to visit "Doc" and to be "taken in" by

him for a week while I worked with specimens in the collection at the University of Oklahoma. Each evening we sat in his living room and "talked birds." I, for the most part, listened.

The evenings he shared with me were some of the most exciting of my life. The impressions he left are indelible. As I began reading "Bird Student" I could hear "Doc" speaking the words to me. He wrote as he spoke. And this conversational style makes the reader feel as if he is right there at the scene of the action.

"Bird Student" is an autobiography of George Sutton's boyhood days in Oregon, Illinois, Texas, West Virginia, New York, and Pittsburgh. It also includes accounts of his first expeditions to Labrador, Hudson Bay, and the far north, ending with an epilogue describing his days as a graduate student at Cornell University.

The color plates include a profile of a Snowy Owl, a Pied-billed Grebe, two King Eiders, a Greater Scaup, an Oldsquaw, a Labrador landscape, some Arctic char, and a walrus. All are exquisite and well-reproduced.

No bird lover, no armchair adventurer, no aspiring field ornithologist should miss the excitement and inspiration to be found in "Bird Student."--J.A.J.

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Organized 30 April 1955

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