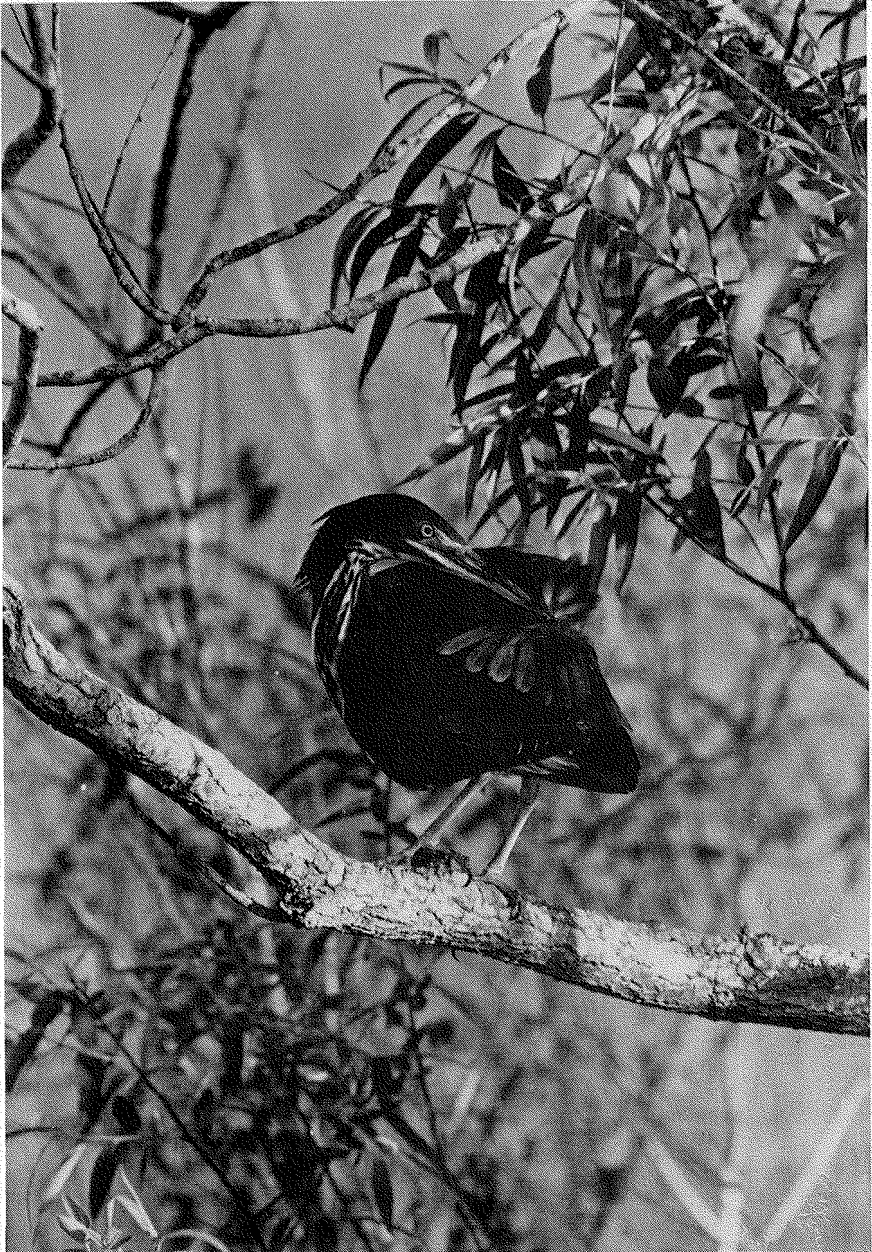


ISSN 0737-0393

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Vol. 15 (1)

July 1985



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

Vol. 15, No. 1

July 1985

Contents

First North Mississippi Record of the Red Phalarope W. Marvin Davis.....	2
Killdeer Nest Abandonment Possibly Caused by Ants Bette J. Schardien Jackson and Jerome A. Jackson.....	5
First Mississippi Records of Lesser Black-backed Gull Judith A. Toups.....	7
Great Black-backed Gull: First Mississippi Records Maury Covington, Joseph McGee, and Judith A. Toups.....	9
Reviews.....	11
M.O.S. Officers and Membership Information.....	Back Cover
Front Cover: A Green-backed Heron preening. (Photo by Jerome A. Jackson.)	

First North Mississippi Record of the Red Phalarope

W. Marvin Davis

School of Pharmacy
University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677

The Red Phalarope (Phalaropus fulicarius) is the most strictly pelagic of the three phalaropes in its migration routes and winter occurrences away from its Arctic nesting grounds. However, the many scattered fall records of the species from throughout the interior of the United States indicate the limited use of an alternative intracontinental southward migration pathway. Imhof (1976) described the Red Phalarope as "regular, sometimes common, in winter in the Gulf of Mexico off the Alabama and Florida coasts." The four records of Red Phalarope in southern Mississippi prior to 1984 came either from Mississippi Sound (1) or from the sewage lagoon complex at Hattiesburg (3), also relatively near the Gulf coast (Gates and Runzo 1978, Moore et al. 1981, L. Gates pers. comm.). Thus, a sighting of a Red Phalarope in the fall of 1984 in Panola County extends the recorded sites of occurrence for this species to include north Mississippi.

On 13 October 1984, I visited a low, wet spot in the bottomlands of the Tallahatchie River about 7.5 km west of Sardis Dam and about 400 m north of Mississippi highway 35. This seasonal wet spot of about 1-1.5 ha, an agricultural field with exposed mud and sparse flattened dead weeds, sometimes provides suitable habitat for spring and fall migrant shorebirds, as well as for ducks during the winter. I approached the area with Mr. and Mrs. Dana Swan, Mr. and Mrs. Gene Knight, and Judy Burkepile, noting the presence of a number of shorebirds. We quickly identified Killdeer (Charadrius vociferus), Common Snipe (Capella gallinago), Lesser Yellowlegs (Tringa flavipes), and Solitary Sandpiper (Tringa solitarius). A Red Phalarope, however, was unfamiliar to all but myself, and I had seen one only once before. We quickly identified the bird as "different" by its paler plumage and its behavior of wading in water up to its belly and/or floating on the water's surface.

The phalarope had solid gray wings and back, a black line through and behind the eye, plus a black cap starting behind the

eye, narrowing to a line down the back of the neck and broadening where it joined the back color. Everywhere else the plumage was starkly white. The dark bill (lighter toward the base) was short and thick, clearly not the needle-like bill of the other two phalarope species. We studied the bird in good light for 30-40 minutes using binoculars and a 60X spotting scope from a distance of about 100 m. We did not see it in flight. All six observers agreed on the identification. I did not find the phalarope at the slough the next afternoon, but photographed the habitat in which the bird was seen (Figure 1). This seemed an unlikely, rather insignificant "puddle" at which to find a rare, pelagic species in Mississippi.

This fifth reported Red Phalarope for Mississippi occurred within the limited range of prior dates - the earliest being 21 September 1983 (Larry and Terrie Gates) and the latest being on 15 October 1980, both at the Hattiesburg site. It is apparent that Mississippi birders should be alert to the possibility of finding the Red Phalarope in September and October.

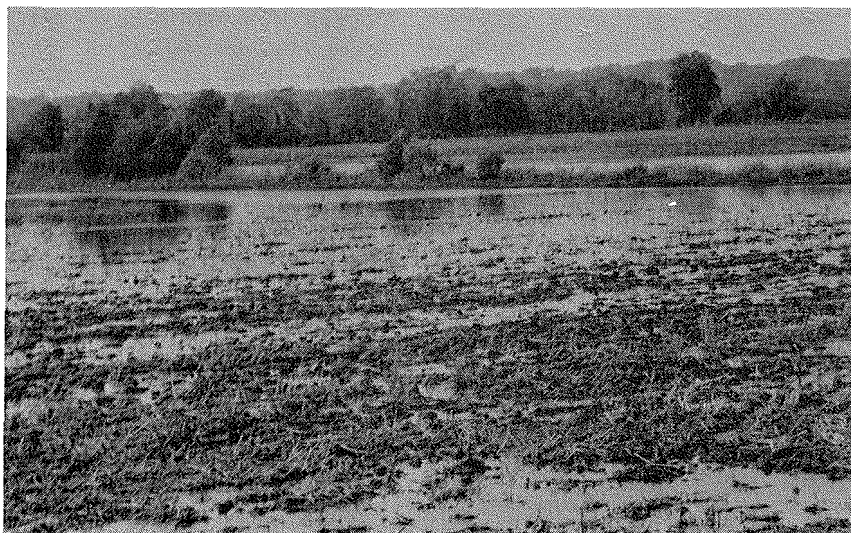


Figure 1. Habitat in which a Red Phalarope was seen, Panola Co., Mississippi.

Literature Cited

- Gates, L., and J. Runzo. 1978. Red Phalarope in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Miss. Kite 8:2.
- Imhof, T.A. 1976. Alabama birds, 2nd ed. University of Alabama Press, University.
- Moore, J.R., T. Fairley, D. Hamilton, and P. Rodriguez. 1981. Observations on a Red Phalarope in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Miss. Kite 11:15-17.

Killdeer Nest Abandonment Possibly Caused by Ants

Bette J. Schardien Jackson and Jerome A. Jackson

Department of Biological Sciences
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762

On 11 July 1984, we discovered a Killdeer (Charadrius vociferus) nest in a 20 cm strip of bare dirt and sparse grasses between a tennis court and a chainlink fence on the Mississippi State University campus in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi. The female was color-banded and known to have nested successfully in the same site in 1983 and at another site earlier in 1984. At the time of discovery the 4 eggs were pipped and all young were alive, active, and peeping, although small ants were moving to and from the nest. When JJ picked up one of the eggs to examine it, ants came streaming from the small hole made by the hatching chick. We removed all of the eggs and killed ants as they left each egg. When no more ants came from the eggs, we formed a new nest depression 10 cm from the old nest and placed the eggs in it. The female immediately returned to shade the eggs from the sun. At 10:00 we returned and the female was on the nest and ants had again found the eggs. We again removed the eggs to rid them of ants, collected some of the ants for identification, and replaced the eggs in the new nest. We then left to look for a suitable chemical to use at the nest to protect the eggs from the ants. When we returned at 10:30, no adult Killdeer was present and the ants had again infested the eggs. We watched until 13:30 and no adult Killdeer appeared. The female's mate was never seen near the nest, but was also color-banded and known to be in the area. At 13:30 we removed the eggs, rid them of ants, and transferred them to a Killdeer nest where four fresh eggs had been broken by a lawn mower 3 hours earlier. That pair, also color-banded, adopted the eggs and three of four chicks hatched and left the nest on 12 July. All three were color-banded and were seen with their adoptive parents two weeks later.

The ants collected were later identified by Richard Brown as Iridomyrmex pruinosus, a species native to the Gulf states. Members of this genus are known to invade bird nests and to feed on eggs. They are also said to "drive setting hens from the nest, especially when the eggs are accidentally broken, and kill hatching chicks" (Smith 1965:54).

Trivers (1972) has discussed what has become known as the theory of "parental investment," wherein the more parents have invested in their young, the stronger the attachment becomes and the less likely they will abandon a nest. We have never known adult Killdeer to abandon all of their hatching young, although late hatching young are occasionally left in favor of leading the others away. Thus, some potent stimulus was involved in the desertion by the parents. We believe it was the presence of the ants.

Also of interest is the adoption of hatching eggs by the Killdeer pair whose own eggs had been destroyed. Their eggs had been incubated for only four days before they were destroyed, thus, they "hatched" young and successfully cared for them after they had incubated eggs for only five days. Normal incubation requires about 24 days (Schardien 1981).

Acknowledgments

We thank Richard Brown of the Mississippi State University Department of Entomology for identifying the ants.

Literature Cited

- Schardien, B.J. 1981. Behavioral ecology of a southern population of Killdeer. Ph.D. dissertation, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State.
- Smith, M.R. 1965. House-infesting ants of the eastern United States. U.S.D.A. Tech. Bull. 1326.
- Trivers, R.L. 1972. Parental investment and sexual selection. Pp. 136-179, in B. Campbell, ed., Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man. Aldine, Chicago, Illinois.

First Mississippi Records of Lesser Black-backed Gull

Judith A. Toups

4 Hartford Place
Gulfport, MS 39507

On 2 March 1983, Mickey Baker, Marianne Towell, and I observed and photographed a basic-plumaged adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus) on the beach in Gulfport, Harrison County, for the first record of the species in Mississippi. The photographs are on file in the ornithological collections at Mississippi State University.

The bird was larger than the Ring-billed Gull (L. delawarensis), and slightly smaller than the Herring Gull (L. argentatus), noted through direct size comparison. Other aspects not readily visible in the photographs are the red orbital ring, and the slight contrast between black primaries and blackish-dusky remainder of the upperwing. In all observations made in middle to late March, the dusky head streakings were less obvious, with the head appearing entirely white.

This gull was seen almost daily from 2 to 31 March 1983; easily located by its dark plumage and large size. It was consistently found along an 8 km stretch of beach, often in company with Herring, Ring-billed, and Laughing (L. atricilla) gulls, and frequently joining mixed flocks when passers-by tossed bread to the gulls.

What may have been the same individual was found again on 12 November 1983, in the same area as the original sighting. It remained in that vicinity until at least 27 March 1984. Again, on 25 October 1984, a winter-plumaged adult Lesser Black-backed Gull was found in the same location and was seen repeatedly along the same stretch of beach as all previous sightings, until at least 18 March 1985.

In addition to the above records, I saw and photographed a Lesser Black-backed Gull in second-winter plumage in the same general location as prior sightings of the adult bird, on 30 January 1985. It remained only a few hours.

The Lesser Black-backed Gull breeds in western Europe; there are three subspecies, adults of which are recognizable in the field. I identified the adult gull discussed above as *L. f. graellsii*, that subspecies believed to be more common in North America (Harrison 1983), and lighter in mantle and wing color than the other subspecies. It breeds in Iceland, the Faeroes, the British Isles, the Netherlands, Brittany, and southwest Spain (Grant 1982).

The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding (Farrand 1983) includes this assessment of the Lesser Black-backed Gull: "... a rare European visitor, has been seen in North America with increasing regularity, especially among flocks of migrating and wintering gulls that gather around beaches, harbors, and landfills of the Great Lakes and East Coast."

Although its presence along the northern Gulf Coast is still considered accidental, it has been recorded along the Florida panhandle and on the coasts of Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas nearly annually.

Immature-plumaged Lesser Black-backed Gulls may go unnoticed unless searched for, but the frequency of sightings along the northern Gulf Coast suggests that they should be anticipated and keyed out whenever possible. Adults are unmistakable.

A number of birders contributed their observations, and I wish to acknowledge Malcolm F. Hodges, Jr., Jerome A. Jackson, Evelyn Johnson, Dalton King, Joseph McGee, and Gerry Morgan.

Literature Cited

- Farrand, J., Jr., ed. 1983. The Audubon Society master guide to birding. 2: Gulls to dippers. Knopf, New York.
- Grant, P.J. 1982. Gulls. A guide to identification. Poyser Ltd., Staffordshire, England.
- Harrison, P. 1983. Seabirds. An identification guide. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.

Great Black-backed Gull: First Mississippi Records

Maury Covington,	Joseph McGee,	Judith A. Toups
543 Orange Ave. Milford, CT 06460	Route 1, Box 148 Hickory, MS 39332	4 Hartford Pl. Gulfport, MS 39501

We observed and photographed a Great Black-backed Gull (Larus marinus) in Biloxi, Harrison County, Mississippi on 15 March 1984. The gull was present through 21 March 1983 and was observed by many others. This marks the first occurrence of Great Black-backed Gull in Mississippi. Copies of the photographs are on file in the ornithological collections at Mississippi State University.

The gull was immature, and not immediately obvious as a Great Black-backed Gull by size or plumage as it rested on a piling in the Mississippi Sound near the Old Biloxi Lighthouse. A closer look revealed that it was larger than a Herring Gull (L. argentatus) on a nearby piling, and much larger than Ring-billed Gulls (L. delawarensis) which were also present.

The Great Black-backed Gull had a heavier bill, thicker legs, a whitish head, and very dark mantle and wing plumage which was noticeably darker than that of a first-winter Herring Gull on the next piling. It was urged to flight, and presented the saddle-backed appearance of a black-backed gull. The tail, which was dirty white, had a rather well-defined black band, edged in white (whiter but not as extensive as that of the immature Herring Gull).

We approached the Great Black-back as it rested with other gulls, and Covington obtained photographs. They show a size difference between the Great Black-backed and Herring gulls. The dark blackish mantle of the former contrasts markedly with that of the lighter, brownish mantle of the Herring Gull. The heavier, thicker bill and the heavy tarsi of the Great Black-backed Gull are also evident.

We studied the gull for about 10 minutes before it flew to the east. Our observations were made at about 14:30 under low cloud cover and with a slight mist falling.

On 16 March 1983, Toups located what appeared to be the same individual farther east on the beach at Biloxi. Two other

observers (David Ruple and Betsy Washington) later saw the gull in the same place. From 15 to 21 March 1983, the gull was seen by at least 20 observers, either at rest on a piling, on the mainland beach, or on the north beach of Deer Island, less than 0.5 km away. At that distance, and with the aid of a spotting scope, the gull could be easily located and identified.

On 18 March 1983, the gull was found near the bulkhead of the Biloxi smallcraft harbor, where Toups photographed it from less than 10 m away. Although not clearly defined in the photographs, the bill, which had appeared all black at greater distances, was lightly tipped in flesh color; the flesh color was repeated at the base of the bill. This characteristic seems to indicate a second-winter gull (Grant 1982, Harrison 1983).

The Great Black-backed Gull breeds on the east and west coasts of the north Atlantic Ocean. It occurs regularly along the eastern seaboard of the United States as far south as Florida, and has been documented in Alabama (pers. obs.) and Louisiana (Purrington 1982). The documentation of this species in Mississippi indicates that it occurs at least occasionally along the entire northern Gulf Coast.

In addition to the Great Black-backed Gull of March 1983, there are two more recent sight records. I saw two immatures at Biloxi on 8 May 1984, and Larry Gates saw another in flight over the Mississippi Sound at Bellefontaine Beach, Jackson County, on 17 December 1984.

Literature Cited

- Grant, P.J. 1982. Gulls. A Guide to identification. Poyser, Ltd., Staffordshire, England.
- Harrison, P. 1983. Seabirds. An identification guide. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.
- Purrington, R.D. 1982. Central Southern Region. Am. Birds 36: 186-188.

REVIEWS

The Florida Scrub Jay. Demography of a Cooperative-breeding Bird. By Glen E. Woolfenden and John W. Fitzpatrick. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984: 406 pp., graphs, tables, line drawings, black-and-white photographs. \$45 (cloth), \$14.50 (paper).

This book is the fruit of a decade of exhaustive research and observations of a population of Florida Scrub Jays. This subspecies is interesting in that overcrowding and habitat loss have apparently forced the birds to adopt cooperative-breeding behavior. That is, adult non-breeding birds aid the breeding pair in the raising of young and defense of the territory for up to several years until they themselves become breeders. In their long-term study, the authors came to know the lives and ways of a stable group of these jays in intimate detail.

"The Florida Scrub Jay" is not a "picture book." The only color plate is the cover/frontispiece, and only a few black-and-white habitat shots adorn the pages. Instead, this is a serious, well-organized account of the characteristics of a population of Scrub Jays. Chapters of the book deal with such subjects as pair bonding, territory, dispersal of young, and the evolution of sociality in Florida Scrub Jays. Each chapter begins with a brief synopsis of its contents. I found these introductions to be extremely helpful encapsulations of the chapters' findings. They are well-written and, although thorough, entice the reader to investigate the details of the subject. Chapters are broken down into sub-topics, which are illustrated with graphs, drawings, and tables where needed. The book is mostly written in a style easily read by the layman; only the authors' discussion of jay sociality and its evolution (Chapter 10) did I find difficult to understand. Several appendices, a literature cited section, and indices conclude the book.

I found this book to be a delightfully in-depth look into the behavior of a fascinating species. There is little the authors didn't know about their Scrub Jays--one wishes all research could be so comprehensive. I think "The Florida Scrub Jay" has something to offer all lovers of birds, especially those who wish to delve deeper into bird behavior. I recommend it highly.--Malcolm F. Hodges, Jr.

Nest Building and Bird Behavior. By Nicholas E. Collias and Elsie C. Collias. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984:336 pp., 14 drawings, 64 black-and-white photographs. \$45 (cloth), \$16.50 (paper).

As a husband and wife team, Nicholas and Elsie Collias have spent many years studying the breeding biology of birds, particularly the African weaverbirds. The complexity of woven nests of various weaverbird species led them to look at the nest-building behavior of other species. This major work delves into the variability found in construction of bird nests, how the variability is distributed among the birds of the world, and the significance such variation has on the family lives of birds. The Collias' discuss such problems as which sex chooses the nest site, and how nest construction relates to climatic differences. They also discuss the complex adaptations and coadaptations of brood parasites and their hosts, and bird predators and their intended victims.

The Collias' rely heavily on their own work, but they have also drawn together a very thorough review of the literature dealing with bird nests. Their bibliography of over 500 references will be a goldmine for future researchers! Although this is a book that will be of most use to the professional, it is so clearly written and includes such fascinating material that it could certainly be enjoyed by any serious naturalist, amateur or professional, backyard birder or full-time researcher. This is a must for any good college or university library.--Jerome A. Jackson.

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Mississippi Ornithological Society
Organized 30 April 1955

Officers

President	Bette J. Schardien Jackson Department of Biological Sciences Mississippi State University Mississippi State, MS 39762
Vice-President	L. Hal Moore 1 Lakeside Drive Vicksburg, MS 39180
Secretary	Janet Dubuisson 2 E. 52nd St. Gulfport, MS 39501
Treasurer	G. Edward Alexander 930 S. Washington Greenville, MS 38701
Editor, MOS Newsletter	Judith A. Touns 4 Hartford Place Gulfport, MS 39501
Editor, Mississippi Kite	Jerome A. Jackson Department of Biological Sciences Mississippi State University Mississippi State, MS 39762

MOS Memberships

Honorary	No dues
Life	\$100
Sustaining	20 (or more)
Active	10
Corresponding	10
Library Subscriptions	10
Junior (under 17) and Golden Age (over 65)	4

Membership and subscription dues should be sent to the Treasurer. The Mississippi Kite is currently published twice a year and is sent to all classes of membership.