

ISSN 0737-0393

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Vol. 17 (1)

July 1987



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

Vol. 17, No. 1

July 1987

Contents

Ross' Goose in Mississippi John Fulton	2
Avian Mortality During Spring Migration at a North Mississippi Television Tower W. Marvin Davis	5
Baird's Sandpipers in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, with a Review of Previous Records for the State Terence Lee Schiefer and Malcolm F. Hodges, Jr.	8
Reviews	11
M.O.S. Officers and Membership Information	Back Cover

Front Cover: Nestling Red-winged Blackbird. (Photo by Jerome A. Jackson)

Ross' Goose in Mississippi

John Fulton

Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge
Route 1, Box 286
Hollandale, MS 38748

Ross' Goose (Chen rossii) winters primarily in California's Central Valley. It has been occasionally taken by hunters in Louisiana and Texas and seen east to Alabama, Florida, and North Carolina (Bellrose 1976; Bent 1962; Peterson 1961; Terres 1980; pers. comms. with T.M. Wilkins, H. Beierman, A.L. Bowman, and P. Yakupzak). Ross' Goose is often found in flocks of the more common Snow Goose (C. caerulescens). Large concentrations of white and blue phase Snow Geese pass through Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, Washington County, Mississippi, each year enroute to or from the Gulf Coast. To my knowledge, there have been no reports of Ross' Goose until now from inland Mississippi.

On the afternoon of 16 February 1986, I observed two white waterfowl swimming together in Deer Lake at the refuge. They stayed close together with the larger following the smaller one. The larger of the two was immediately recognized as a Snow Goose. The other was 30% smaller with a small triangular bill, light at the tip and dark at the base. Its neck-to-body proportions seemed more like that of a duck than a Snow Goose. With 7x50 binoculars at 40 m, no grin patch was visible, whereas the grin patch ("black lips") on the larger goose was. As I reached for a spotting scope the smaller goose flushed; the larger goose followed the smaller one closely from the water into the air, overhead in flight and again on the ground after they landed 200 m away. The two white geese had dropped in among 35 White-fronted Geese (Anser albifrons) feeding in a winter wheat field.

At that time I notified Refuge Manager Tim Wilkins by radio that an unusual goose was on the refuge. Wilkins had prior experience identifying Ross' Goose but had not seen it on Yazoo NWR before. Within minutes he was watching the suspect bird feeding in the wheat within 100 to 200 m of our 60x spotting scopes. The geese all flushed as I tried to approach within 100 m. The Ross' Goose took wing first, heading to my left. The Snow Goose flushed one wingbeat later going right. A second later the 35 White-fronted Geese took off towards the Snow Goose.

By the time the 37 geese were all airborne they were all flying in formation with the Snow Goose leading them north and the Ross' Goose had made a U-turn and caught up with the end of the line.

The wingbeat and flight speed of the Ross' Goose were faster than those of the Snow Goose; by comparison, the White-fronted Geese looked slow, unhurried, even nonchalant. The Ross' Goose quickly moved up the ranks to the front of the flock and then turned east towards Deer Lake Slough. The 37 geese landed amidst 4000 Snow Geese, 1000 Canada Geese (Branta canadensis), and 600 White-fronted Geese over 600 m away. It was impossible to locate one small white goose in a flock of 5600 larger geese.

On 17 February 1986, at least one Ross' Goose was observed off and on for a total of over an hour among 3500 blue and white phase Snow Geese in the wheat west of Deer Lake between 11:00 and 17:00. Scanning the large flock from side-to-side from a distance of 200 m would consistently reveal a small sparkling white goose with a short, thick curved neck. Its rounded head would be tipped forward so the bottom of its small dark bill dropped 30 degrees below horizontal. The size of the flock prevented keeping track of one bird for very long, causing suspicion that more than one Ross' must have been present.

By 18 February, the lateness of the season and warm southerly breezes had pared the goose population to 2500; on 19 February, 1500 remained; on 20 February the last 40 geese on Yazoo NWR were Canadas. As the total number of geese dwindled it became possible to follow individuals within the flock. On 18 February three Ross' Geese were seen among the 2500 blue and white Snows. On 19 February four Ross' were seen at one time scattered among 1500 blues and white phase Snow Geese.

The first Ross' was noticed primarily due to its diminutive size in comparison to the nearby Snow Goose. Several hours of subsequent observations over the course of four days revealed many other differences between these two closely-related species. Besides up to a 30% size difference, major differences noted in the field are listed in Table 1.

In summary, four Ross' Geese were seen in Mississippi at Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge between 16-19 February 1986. Several diagnostic features were noted that can be used for species' identification.

Table 1. Differences in appearance between Snow and Ross' geese.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Snow Goose</u>	<u>Ross' Goose</u>
Head Shape	Sloped forehead	Rounded
Profile resembled	Canvasback	Redhead
Body size	Large	10-30% smaller
Neck:		
Length	Long	25-50% shorter
Thickness/length	< 1/5 length	> 1/4 length
Thinnest part	7 cm below head	At head
Shape	Long, slender hourglass	Goitrous or pear-shaped
Attitude	Held straight	Held in S-curve
Bill:		
Impression	Curvaceous	Conical
At cheek	Concave	Straight
Top (between eyes)	Concave	Straight
Chin	Concave	Straight
At eyes	Convex projection	Sharp 75-degree angle
Color darkest	At grin patch	At base
Size	Large	50% smaller
Attitude	Held horizontal	Tipped down 30 degrees
Wingbeat speed	Moderate	Rapid

Literature Cited

- Bellrose, F.C. 1976. Ducks, geese, and swans of North America. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
- Bent, A.C. 1940. Life histories of North American wild fowl. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. no. 126, pt. 1. Washington, D.C.
- National Geographic Society. 1983. Field guide to the birds of North America. Washington, D.C.
- Peterson, R.T. 1961. A field guide to western birds. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.
- Terres, J.K. 1980. The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Avian Mortality During Spring Migration at a
North Mississippi Television Tower

W. Marvin Davis

School of Pharmacy, University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677

During nocturnal migration birds have been killed by hitting tall towers or buildings in several areas of the eastern United States, ranging from Minnesota in the northwest (Raveling and Warner 1978) to Florida in the southeast (Crawford 1978, 1981). I have found no records of such mortality from Mississippi, and only one from immediately surrounding areas of adjacent states, e.g. Memphis, Tennessee (Coffey 1964). Therefore, it seems in order to describe one such incident and to call attention to possible occurrences of this sort in other parts of Mississippi. A noteworthy aspect of this "bird kill" was its occurrence during spring migration, whereas most published reports on such incidents are from fall migration. One exception giving considerable attention to spring migration kills is the early report of Stoddard (1962).

The transmitter tower and building of WMAV-TV, a regional outlet of the Mississippi Educational Television Network, are located 18.3 km west-southwest of the center of Oxford. On the morning of 21 April 1984, a local resident, Robert E. Briscoe, noticed brightly-colored birds lying dead on a dirt road west of the tower. These were approximately beneath one of the four large anchoring cables extending outward to a distance of ca. 300 m from the base of the tower. Stopping to investigate, Mr. Briscoe walked along the area cleared of brush beneath the cable until he reached the fence around the installation. In a distance of ca. 80 m along this cleared strip, he saw approximately 200 dead birds plus 2 or 3 injured beyond ability to fly. A number of the bodies were being attacked by ants or other insects, and there were several collections of feathers indicative of birds that had already been devoured by scavengers. Mr. Briscoe picked up 26 dead birds that were free of insects and undamaged, brought them to Oxford and gave them to Hugh L. Quarles, who later conveyed them to me. This sample of ca. 10% of the birds noted by Briscoe consisted of the following:

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Wood Thrush (<u>Hylocichla mustelina</u>)	5
Gray Catbird (<u>Dumetella carolinensis</u>)	1
Yellow-throated Vireo (<u>Vireo flavifrons</u>)	2
Red-eyed Vireo (<u>V. olivaceus</u>)	3
Golden-winged Warbler (<u>Vermivora chrysoptera</u>)	1 male
Tennessee Warbler (<u>V. peregrina</u>)	3
Bay-breasted Warbler (<u>Dendroica castanea</u>)	1 male
Cerulean Warbler (<u>D. cerulea</u>)	1 each sex
Kentucky Warbler (<u>Oporornis formosus</u>)	4
Yellow-breasted Chat (<u>Icteria virens</u>)	3
Northern Oriole (<u>Icterus galbula</u>)	1 male

The birds have been deposited as mummy specimens in the Vaiden Collection of the Department of Biology, University of Mississippi. It seems likely that many additional birds not seen by Mr. Briscoe may have fallen into the uncleared, brushy areas near the cleared strip that he viewed. Considering that a systematic search was not made, it is possible that the number of dead birds seen by Briscoe (estimated at 200) might have constituted only 10-15% of the actual toll. A "bird kill" of considerable magnitude is apparently represented by these observations.

The WMAV-TV tower rises 397.5 m above ground to an elevation of 538.6 m above sea level. On the evening of 20 April surface weather observations recorded at the University-Oxford Airport (ca. 16 km to the northeast) showed a ceiling of about 365 m with broken clouds, visibility of 8 km with fog and wind from the east at 10 knots. Thus, the top of the WMAV-TV tower may have been in clouds on the night of the tower-mortality of the migrants. The apparent clustering of dead birds on the ground mainly to the west of the tower, as best can be known from Briscoe's report, is consistent with a significant wind from the east. These conditions are in accord with those described by Tordoff and Mengel (1956) as promoting TV tower kills, namely, "cloud ceiling down to as low as 800-1000 feet" that "presumably force the migrating birds to fly below the cloud ceiling and thus brings them within the altitudinal range of the television towers."

Transmitter towers in the range of heights between 365 and 730 m occur in several other areas of Mississippi, three southwest of Jackson alone. Birders in such areas should be alerted to the possible occurrence of similar bird kills. Such incidents have served as a source of valuable specimens of species rarely noted otherwise.

I thank H.L. Quarles for calling this incident to my attention and especially to R.E. Briscoe for providing information concerning his observations. I am grateful to Jeff

Medders who supplied weather data from the airport files, and to Ben B. Coffey, Jr., who loaned copies of earlier literature on this subject.

Literature Cited

- Coffey, B.B., Jr. 1964. Two bird kills at WMC-TV, Memphis. *Migrant* 35:53.
- Crawford, R.L. 1978. Autumn bird casualties at a northwest Florida TV tower: 1973-1975. *Wilson Bull.* 90:335-345.
- . 1981. Weather, migration and autumn bird kills at a north Florida TV tower. *Wilson Bull.* 93:189-195.
- Raveling, D.G., and D.W. Warner. 1978. Geographic variation of Yellow Warblers killed at a TV tower. *Auk* 95:73-79.
- Stoddard, H.L., Sr. 1962. Bird casualties at a Leon County, Florida TV tower, 1955-1961. Tall Timbers Research Station Bulletin No. 1, Tallahassee.
- Tordoff, H.B., and R.M. Mengel. 1956. Studies of birds killed in nocturnal migration. *Univ. Kansas Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 10:1-44.

Baird's Sandpipers in Oktibbeha County,
Mississippi, with a Review of Previous
Records for the State

Terence Lee Schiefer and Malcolm F. Hodges, Jr.

Department of Entomology Department of Biological Sciences

Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, Mississippi 39762

Baird's Sandpiper (Calidris bairdii) is a small sandpiper that migrates principally through the Great Plains (Terres 1980). Before fall 1986, the species was known in Mississippi as a rare but regular migrant, usually in numbers of one to three individuals. Reviewing records published in the Mississippi Kite, we found 14 occurrences spanning the years 1977 through 1986, with no records for 1979 or 1980. Five spring records of Baird's Sandpiper fall within the dates 22 March and 11 May, with from one to three individuals (Jackson and Cooley 1978, Jackson 1981, Hodges 1985, Jackson 1986). Eight sightings from fall span the dates 12 August through 28 September, numbering from one to five birds (Weber and Jackson 1978, Jackson and Cooley 1978, Jackson 1982, Schardien and Jackson 1983, Hodges and Jackson 1984, Hodges 1985). The only specimens we know of for the state are, first, a bird collected on 14 October 1937 by M.G. Vaiden in Bolivar County (Gandy and Turcotte 1970); and, second, seven birds (four males and three females) collected between 3 and 17 September 1960, also by Vaiden in Bolivar County. These specimens are in the M.G. Vaiden Collection, University of Mississippi. An unpublished record of two Baird's Sandpipers seen by Hodges and Judith A. Toups on 20 July 1978 probably represented early fall migrants. Another record outside the usual dates was a bird seen by Toups on 17 December 1977 (Weber 1978).

Most records were along or near the Mississippi coast (two Hattiesburg records); the only other upstate record besides Vaiden's specimens was a bird seen on 11 May 1985 at Sardis Dam, Panola County, by Marvin Davis and Gene Knight (Hodges 1985). Most records (nine) were from the Pascagoula River marsh, Jackson County, where the birds have been seen among the numerous other shorebirds using the area as a migration stopover.

During the fall of 1986, Oktibbeha County Lake, an impoundment of approximately 250 ha in east-central Mississippi, was drained to about half its normal level for improvements. The resulting exposed mud-flat was attractive to shorebirds, to which our list of 17 species will attest. Baird's Sandpipers were a major component of this movement.

Schiefer first saw seven Baird's Sandpipers on 27 September; later the same day, Hodges counted 15. The shorebird flocks were moving about, and some parts of the flats could not be reached for viewing. Thus, it was hard to obtain an accurate assessment of the number of individuals present. On 28 September, 23 birds were counted, when Margaret Copeland and Julia Broyles also saw them. Schiefer saw about 10 Baird's Sandpipers at Oktibbeha County Lake on both 29 and 30 September, but no more were seen until 9 October, when Hodges found two. He saw five on 11 October, but none was located on several trips later that month. However, Hodges found two Baird's Sandpipers at the same location on 2 November. Single birds were seen by Schiefer on 6 November and by Hodges on 8 November.

These sightings are not only the first for Oktibbeha County, but for any upstate location away from the Delta. The peak count of 23 birds surpasses by far the previous state high of five birds. Finally, this is the first time Baird's Sandpipers have been found to linger at one location for any length of time in Mississippi.

Literature Cited

- Gandy, B.E., and W.H. Turcotte. 1970. Catalog of Mississippi bird records. Vol. 1. Miss. Game and Fish Commission, Jackson.
- Hodges, M.F., Jr. 1985. Birds around the state: December 1984-November 1985. Miss. Kite 15:24-38.
- and J.A. Jackson. 1984. Birds around the state: December 1983-November 1984. Miss. Kite 14:12-25.
- Jackson, J.A. 1981. Birds around the state: June 1980-May 1981. Miss. Kite 11:18-34.
- . 1982. Birds around the state: January - December 1982. Miss. Kite 12:14-31.
- . 1986. Birds around the state: December 1985-May 1986. Miss. Kite 16:31-39.

- and C.D. Cooley. 1978. Birds around the state: December 1977 through November 1978. Miss. Kite 8:48-62.
- Schardien, B.J., and J.A. Jackson. 1983. Birds around the state: January - December 1983. Miss. Kite 13:15-28.
- Terres, J.K. 1980. The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York.
- Weber, W.C. 1978. Summary of Mississippi Christmas Bird Counts, 1977-78. Miss. Kite 8:14-17.
- and J.A. Jackson. 1978. Birds around the state - fall migration, 1977. Miss. Kite 8:19-27.

REVIEWS

Sutton, George M. 1986. *Birds Worth Watching*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma. 207 pp., 60 color photographs. \$19.95, hardcover.

Shortly before his death, Doc Sutton completed the manuscript for this excellent introduction to sixty of our birds that he felt were worth knowing a bit more about. The species singled out by Sutton include some of the most common and best loved of North American birds -- e.g., Eastern Screech-Owl, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Northern Cardinal, and Loggerhead Shrike. They also include a few lesser known birds -- such as Ladder-backed Woodpecker, White-necked Raven, and Canyon Wren. Each species is illustrated by an excellent color photograph -- mostly of adult birds, but some of nestlings (e.g., Yellow-billed Cuckoo), and some of adults and young (such as a wonderful photo of two Chimney Swifts at their nest with three nestlings).

The value of this book lies not just in the high quality of the information and illustrations, but also in the readability and usefulness of the text. This book would make a great gift for an aspiring bird student. It not only shares some little known information about the birds, but raises many questions that are fodder for further study. I highly recommend it!--Jerome A. Jackson.

Heintzelman, Donald S. 1984. *Guide to Owl Watching in North America*. Winchester Press, New Century Publishers, Inc., Piscataway, New Jersey. 193 pp., numerous black-and-white photos. \$8.95 paperback.

If you are an owl aficionado, you might well want to invest in this little guide. Heintzelman begins with a brief sketch of the distribution, characteristics, habits, and habitats of the 19 species of owls that characterize North America. Information provided goes beyond basic field guides in providing identification clues and describing details of habitats and behavior. Other chapters provide information on ways of finding owls, equipment to use in owl-watching, identification of owl pellets, special adaptations of owls, and owl conservation. One large section of the book includes photographs of each species

and key identifying characteristics in outline form. The book concludes with a guide to places where one might find good owl-watching. Many of these are parks and refuges, others are special places that the author has found particularly productive for certain species. These location accounts list the owl species to be found, their season of occurrence, access information, and suggestions for finding the featured species. Some of these accounts may be useful, but those for Mississippi were quite disappointing. Only two localities were mentioned, the Harrison Experimental Forest near Gulfport, and Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge near Starkville. For both of these localities, the only owl listed as present is the Barred Owl! Accounts for other areas and more exotic species seem much more useful.--Jerome A. Jackson.

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Mississippi Ornithological Society
Organized 30 April 1955

Officers

President	Judith A. Toups 4 Hartford Place Gulfport, MS 39507
Vice-President	Michael J. McGraw P.O. Box 6034 Jackson, MS 39213
Secretary	John Battalio 4802 Halls Ferry Rd. Vicksburg, MS 39180
Treasurer	Janet Dubuisson 1 Glad Acres Pass Christian, MS 39571
Editor: The Mississippi Kite	Jerome A. Jackson Department of Biological Sciences Mississippi State University Mississippi State, MS 39762
Editor: MOS Newsletter	Malcolm F. Hodges, Jr. Department of Biological Sciences Mississippi State University Mississippi State, MS 39762

MOS Memberships

Honorary	No dues
Life	\$100
Sustaining	20 (or more)
Active	10
Family	15
Library Subscriptions	10
Junior (under 17) and Golden Age (over 65)	4
Junior/Golden Age Family	8

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.