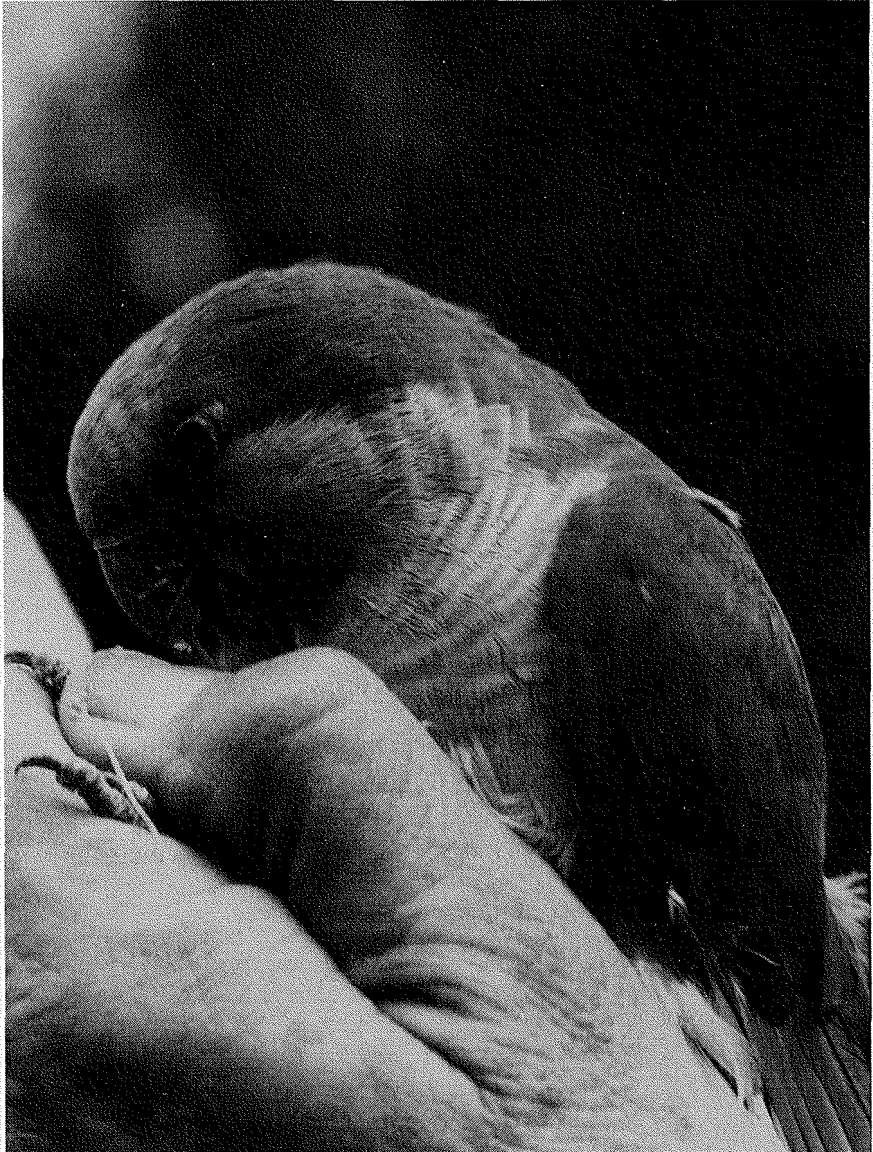


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Front Cover: Adult Monk Parakeet captured in Richland, Mississippi. See article on page 7.
(Photo by Stephen W. Peterson.)

FIRST MISSISSIPPI RECORD OF THE MOUNTAIN PLOVER

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On 17 December 1988, shortly after 4:00 p.m., we drove from the north abutment area at Grenada dam onto the exposed bottom of Grenada Lake, Grenada Co., Mississippi, via a low-water road heading southeastward. About 0.5 mi. along this drive, on the east side of the road, we found a winter-plumaged adult Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*). As is typical of the species, besides having an unmarked, completely brown topside, except for a whitish forehead, it had conspicuous buffy patches at each side of the breast and creamy white throat and underparts. The bird lacked the black lores and frontal bar of the breeding plumage. The distal third of the tail was dark brown to blackish. When seen in flight, the bird showed a faint thin white wingstripe and lighter brown upper tail. The feet and its longish legs appeared to be dull yellow. The bird gave no calls. As others have described the species, it was rather tame and approachable, allowing 30 photographs to be taken from distances of 12-30 feet (Figure 1).

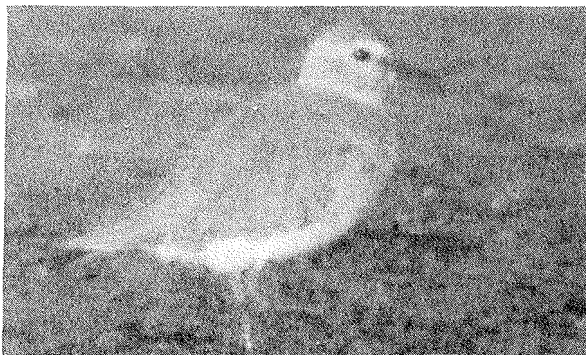


Figure 1. Mountain Plover, photographed near Grenada dam, 17 December 1988.

The Mountain Plover was seen by about 20 more birders through its last sighting on 10 January 1989. Additional photographs were taken during this period. Some observers noted that the plover fed in areas of wet mud where rain water collected or flowed. It was often close to one or more Killdeer (*C. vociferus*). We observed several aggressive interactions between these species. On days after the last sighting there were heavy rains which caused the waters of Grenada Lake to rise, covering the exposed mudflats before 16 January. Presumably it was this loss of the mudflats which precipitated departure of the Mountain Plover.

While the Mountain Plover has not previously been reported in Mississippi, there are records from two adjacent states. A reliable observer saw two Mountain Plovers in a lespedeza field on 16 December 1951, in Arkansas Co., Arkansas (James and Neal 1986), a site 80-120 miles northwest of Grenada Co., Mississippi. A single bird was photographed during a stay from 6 to 15 January 1973, near Mobile Bay and the Gulf Coast at Magnolia Springs, Alabama (Imhof 1976). These dates are very similar to those of the present record. The species has also been reported in other southeastern states (Virginia, Georgia, Florida; DeSante and Pyle 1986). Thus, the Mountain Plover is a species which we might have expected to find eventually in Mississippi.

Photographs of the Mountain Plover at Grenada Lake are on file in the collections at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science and at Mississippi State University.

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BARRED OWL EATS HATCHLING TURTLE

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Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) are well known as opportunistic feeders, including many species of vertebrates and invertebrates in their diet (Bent 1938). On 7 July 1987, I prepared a male Barred Owl as a skeletal specimen for the Mississippi Museum of Natural Sciences collection. The bird had been found dead next to U.S. highway 82 in Pickens Co., Alabama, in October of 1980, and had probably been struck by a vehicle. At the time of its preparation, it weighed 643.8 g. There was almost no fat on the bird. Its testes measured approximately 6 mm in length. In the stomach I found remains of a hatchling slider (*Chrysemys concinna*), a common species frequently seen basking on logs in sloughs (Conant 1978). Its carapace width was 31.4 mm. I preserved the turtle, along with the owl's skeletal remains, as MMNS # Ab5029.

In reviewing the literature on Barred Owl food habits, I found amphibians and reptiles mentioned frequently. Furthermore, I once saw a Barred Owl flying with a snake in its mouth, although I was not able to identify the species. Cahn and Kemp (1930) list the leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*) as the only amphibian or reptile they found in the diet of Barred Owls. Hamerstrom and Hamerstrom (1951) found unidentified toads, frogs, and a snake. Mendall (1944) found a salamander, frogs, and a garter snake. Wilson (1938) reported amphibians as food items. Turtles are mentioned only rarely. Bent (1938) gave "flesh of a terrapin" as a food item. Karalus and Eckert (1974), writing of the northern subspecies (*S.v. varia*), characterize it as "one of the few owls to bother catching and eating turtles." They state that "...Box tortoises often fall prey... Terrapins are taken by this owl without hesitation, though not without peril, as some owls have lost chunks of their toes to turtles before being able to kill them."

I thank Roger Weill, Paul Hartfield, and Terry Van Deventer for helpful advice on turtle habits.

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FALL NESTING OF THE CAROLINA WREN IN CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI

William H. Turcotte

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On 24 October 1988, my son, James F. Turcotte, showed me a completed Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) nest in a woven shelf basket hanging on the outside wall of his home under a covered patio in southwest Jackson, Mississippi. The wrens had been seen earlier in the week building the nest. It was made of green moss, dead leaves, paper, and dried weed stems in the usual fashion with the covered entrance on one side. It was placed behind a ceramic pot containing a plant killed by an earlier freeze. An earlier nest in the same location had produced a brood of five young, although the earlier nest had been removed and discarded.

On 5 and 14 November the nest contained 5 eggs and the wren was observed incubating. On 24 November, after about one week of abandonment, I removed the eggs and all were infertile.

The Carolina Wren is a common, statewide resident. Egg record dates extend from April to 22 August. Four young fledged from the August nest on 4 September 1978 (Turcotte 1978). Nests I have found held 3 to 6 eggs. Most clutches contained 5 eggs, the usual number for this species. My observations over a span of more than 50 years concur with Bent (1948) and others that this wren usually produces two and possibly three broods per season.

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A CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI RECORD OF AN ESCAPED MONK PARAKEET

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On 5 August 1988, Dorothy Turcotte and Nettie Austin heard and saw a Monk Parakeet (*Myopsitta monachus*) perched atop a privet bush along my garden fence in Richland, Mississippi. I was working on the opposite side of the garden while they were taking a morning walk. It was about 7:45 a.m. My wife, Dorothy, called to me that a "pet bird" was on the fencerow beyond my line of sight behind three rows of butterbeans. I walked to the garden gate and outside the garden fence and immediately recognized the bird.

I approached the bird and it flew into the garden and landed on top of a cornstalk. I asked my wife to bring a handful of sunflower seeds. With the seeds in my extended hand, I approached to within less than a meter of the bird. It flew and while in flight made a loud staccato screeching call before alighting about 120 m distant in the upper branches of a large oak. The bird later flew and called several times from a hackberry tree about 40 m from where it was first seen.

I continued working while my wife started picking butterbeans planted along the garden fence. After calling frequently from the hackberry tree, the parakeet flew back to the two rows of corn. My wife saw it fly and land on an ear of corn, which it was eating as she approached and caught it with her bare hands. The bird bit her hand, but did not break the skin. It made loud, screeching distress calls.

The bird was an adult in good plumage with wing feathers intact. It had a plain, round, wire ring on the left leg. The bird had apparently been wing-clipped at one time, since the lower ends of the left side tertiaries were cleanly sheared off. After photographs (see cover) were taken, the bird was taken to the Jackson Zoo. During the time when the Monk Parakeet was in my yard, resident birds were noticeably absent or inconspicuous.

COMMON GRACKLES KILL HOUSE SPARROW

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On 22 April 1987, at 5:50 p.m., my husband and I were looking out our kitchen window watching an immature female House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and a group of Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) eating sunflower seeds on the ground near our feeder. A moment later, we saw four of the grackles in a "huddle". Two were facing each other with necks extended upward stiffly and their beaks pointing straight up. Their feathers were fluffed out. One of the two was smaller than the other and something lay beside it. The larger grackle was acting more dominant, calling ever so often, and making the smaller one step back a little. Suddenly another grackle flew into the midst of the two that were squared off at one another. Immediately there was a lot of pecking and fighting among all the birds in the huddle. It was obvious that the grackles were throwing something around -- whatever had been lying next to the smaller grackle.

I recognized that something as a bird and ran out and broke up the episode -- all of which had occurred within a time frame of about two to three minutes. What I "rescued" was the immature female House Sparrow. I arrived too late, however, as the sparrow was dead. It had been pecked only around its head and its eyes were bulged and its neck broken.

Did the sparrow stumble into the middle of a dominance display? Did the grackles just get carried away, accidentally killing the sparrow?

[Editor's note: The Common Grackle has frequently been reported to kill and eat small birds. This may occur more frequently where birds are concentrated around food sources, such as at bird feeders. Bent (1958. Life Histories of North American Blackbirds, Orioles, Tanagers, and their Allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 211)

records several such instances. The details provided in the above account are, however, well worth noting and may contribute to our understanding of this behavior.]

FIRST SIGHTING OF AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER IN MISSISSIPPI

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On 9 August 1988 at about 2:00 p.m., we spotted an Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) from the south end of Long Beach harbor, Harrison Co., Mississippi. We watched for about 40 sec as the bird flew by from west to east, observing it from as close as 30 m through 7x and 8x binoculars and 22x and 30x spotting scopes. Thinning overcast provided good light. If we were at the center of an imaginary clock and the sun was at 12 o'clock, the bird was first seen at about 10 o'clock and lost at 5. Strong winds were from the south; the temperature was about 80 degrees F. Tropical storm Beryl had just moved ashore at New Orleans.

Our first impression was of a small shearwater, with cigar-shaped body, long, narrow wings, and a thin dark bill. Upperparts were a uniform dark chocolate brown. Underparts were mostly white, but for patches of brown extending down onto the sides of the breast at the shoulder, and brown undertail coverts. The upper surface of the wings may have been slightly darker than the back. The underwings showed a white central area bordered by broad brown edges on both sides and at the tip. The width of the brown seemed about the same for the leading and trailing edges. The tail appeared long. The size of the bill seemed smaller in proportion to the head than in larger species of shearwater.

The bird flew unhurriedly within a meter of the water surface. Series of rapid, shallow wingbeats were followed by long glides. The bird usually flew with wings parallel to the water, lifting to only about 45 degrees above the horizontal. No other birds were seen in direct comparison with the shearwater.

We ruled out Manx Shearwater (*P. puffinus*) due to brown undertail coverts and the width of the brown border at the leading edge of the underwing. Manx has blacker upperparts, although they can wear to brownish-black. Manx also has a more frenetic flight, with steep banking to almost vertical positions. We ruled out Little Shearwater (*P. assimilis*) due to our bird's larger size, stockier build and longer bill, and the plumage characters listed for Manx (Harrison 1983). Small shearwaters breeding in the Cape Verde Islands have been variously placed with Little and Audubon's shearwaters (Harrison 1983); they resemble Audubon's with browner upperparts and brown undertail coverts. The brown border at the leading edge of the underwing is narrower in these birds than in nominate Audubon's Shearwaters, and they are smaller, with a more hurried flight. Little Shearwater is also unlikely to occur in the Gulf of Mexico (Duncan and Havard 1980).

We were unable to photograph the bird due to its distance away and the brevity of the sighting.

Hodges has seen Audubon's Shearwater previously in the Caribbean. Toups and Hodges have experience with several other species of shearwater in both the North Atlantic and North Pacific oceans. Schiefer has seen other shearwaters in the North Atlantic.

Duncan and Havard (1980) mentioned about 26 records of Audubon's Shearwater occurring in the northern Gulf of Mexico before 1980, and considered the species to be of casual occurrence there. We found references to four other northern Gulf sightings since then, the latest in 1987 (Hamilton, 1981, Ortego 1983, Myers and Muth 1984, Muth 1987). This is the first sighting of Audubon's Shearwater for Mississippi. Only one other individual of the Procellariidae has been seen in the state, a Sooty Shearwater (*P. griseus*) on 2 September 1985 in Jackson Co., blown in by Hurricane Elena (Toups and Jackson 1987).

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**LOUIS PATRICK CASHMAN, JR.
1916-1988**

Louis Cashman of Vicksburg, Mississippi, died on 20 December 1988 after an extended illness. Although Louis was handicapped for several years, it didn't slow his desire to go birding. He was always eager to get out and look at birds.

Louis was a past-president of the Mississippi Ornithological Society and co-compiler for the first Vicksburg Christmas Bird Count. He and his wife Frances took part in the Christmas Bird Count each year, and he had planned on being on the 1988 count but became too ill. The "Vicksbirders," a local birding club, counted Louis as one of its original members.

The Vicksburg Evening Post, owned by the Cashman's for over 100 years, credited Louis, as owner and publisher, with the continued success of the paper. It passes to the Cashman children for continued operation. Louis talked and presented slides to every garden club in Vicksburg and adjoining towns on the subject of birding. He was never too busy to take a phone call about strange birds.

Louis will be sorely missed.

-- Hal Moore

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

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Organized 30 April 1955

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