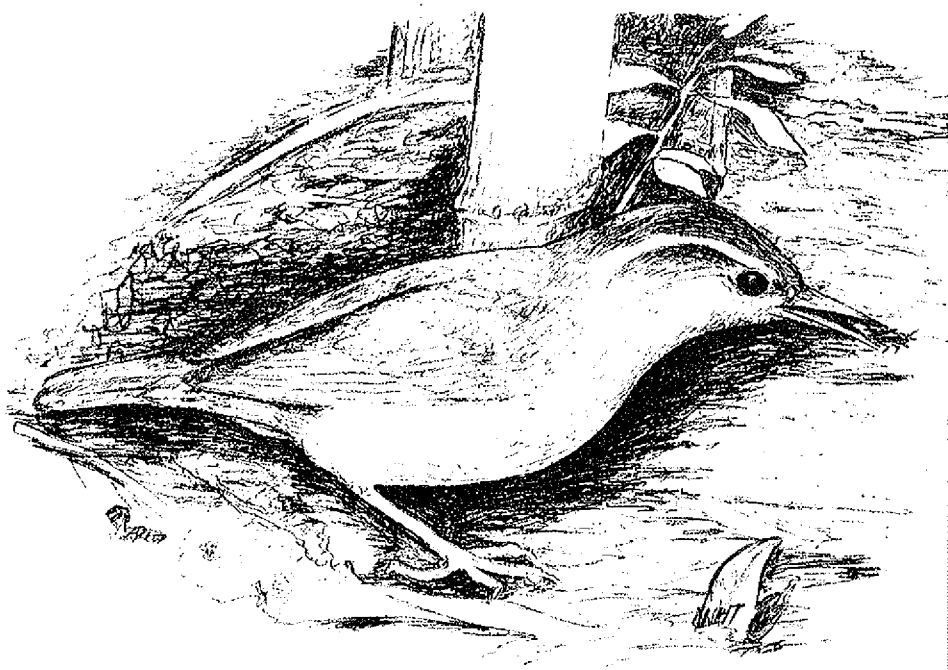
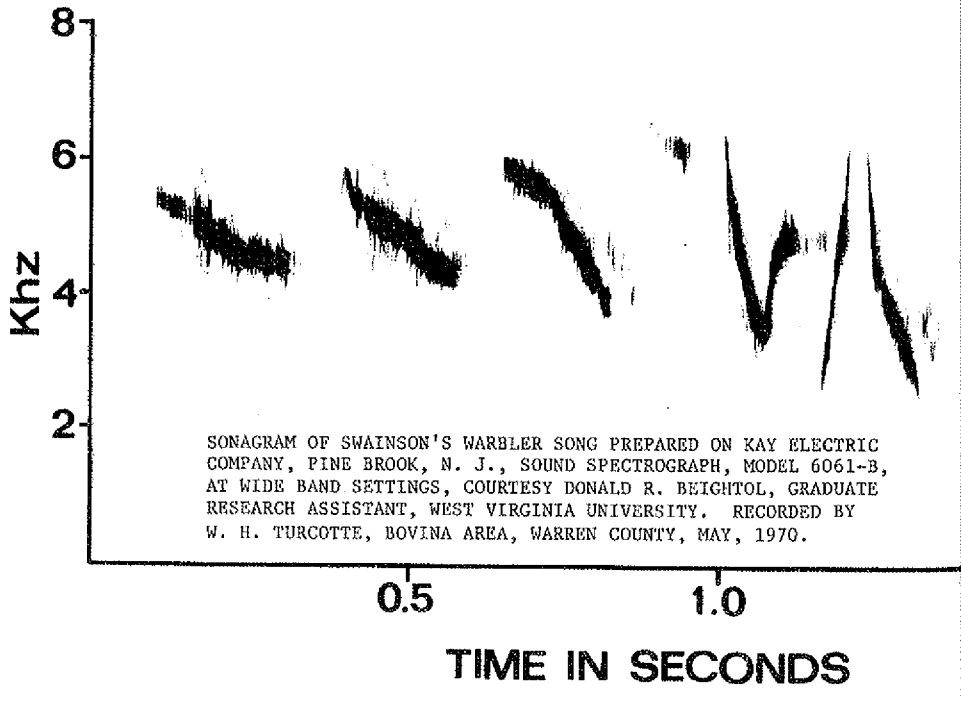
THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Vol. II, Number 1 January, 1972



Swainson's Warbler



SONAGRAM OF SWAINSON'S WARBLER SONG PREPARED ON KAY ELECTRIC COMPANY, PINE BROOK, N. J., SOUND SPECTROGRAPH, MODEL 6061-B, AT WIDE BAND SETTINGS, COURTESY DONALD R. BEIGHTOL, GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT, WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY. RECORDED BY W. H. TURCOTTE, BOVINA AREA, WARREN COUNTY, MAY, 1970.

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Vol. II January 1972 No. 1

Contents

Front Cover: A pair of Mississippi Kites.

The Breeding Biology and Distribution of Swainson's Warbler in Mississippi

By W. H. Turcotte

Abstract: The Swainson's warbler is recorded as fairly common and widely distributed in Mississippi. The breeding range in Mississippi is north of the three counties bordering the Gulf Coast. Typical breeding habitats are alluvial stream bottoms and the narrow valleys in wooded ravines of the deep loessial bluffs bordering the Yazoo Delta and Mississippi River. Arrival dates, on the Gulf Coast,extend from March 31 to April 19 (average date is April 6). North of the three Coast counties spring arrival dates extend from April 8-30 (average date is April 21). Dates of fall migration and departure south of Hattiesburg are from August 1 to October 7. Earliest nesting began April 20 (nest-building) and breeding dates extend to June 14 (young in nest). Of 17 egg records in the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, 11 completed sets contained from 2 to 4 eggs, an average of 3.2. Nine of 17 recorded nests were supported by cane, 5 by low bushes or saplings and 3 by greenbrier. Nest height above ground ranged between 3 and 6 feet, averaging 4.2 feet for 15 recorded nests. Egg records occurred from May 9 to June 11. Seven were before June 1 and 10 egg record dates June 3 through 11. Territorial behavior and nesting habitat are described to aid local ob - servers in finding and observing this little known species in Mississippi.

The Swainson's warbler in Mississippi is typically a late spring and summer resident breeding bird of heavily timbered, alluvial stream bottoms. Sight and and collection records (Fig. 1) confirm its widespread distribution and occurrence as a locally common breeding bird in Mississippi. Bent (1953, pp.30-38) describes the life habits and distribution of the species. Meanley (1971) describes in thorough detail the distribution, ecological relations, breeding biology and behavior of the species throughout the range.

My first introduction to this species was through R. M. Freeman on a field trip in May, 1939 to Richland Creek Swamp southeast of Brandon, Rankin County, Mississippi where a singing male was heard and a recently abandoned nest was found in a greenbrier tangle. Shortly thereafter, I heard and saw other singing males and searched for nests while surveying beaver colonies on Richland Creek. In 1939 and the spring of 1940, Freeman and I heard and saw other singing males while

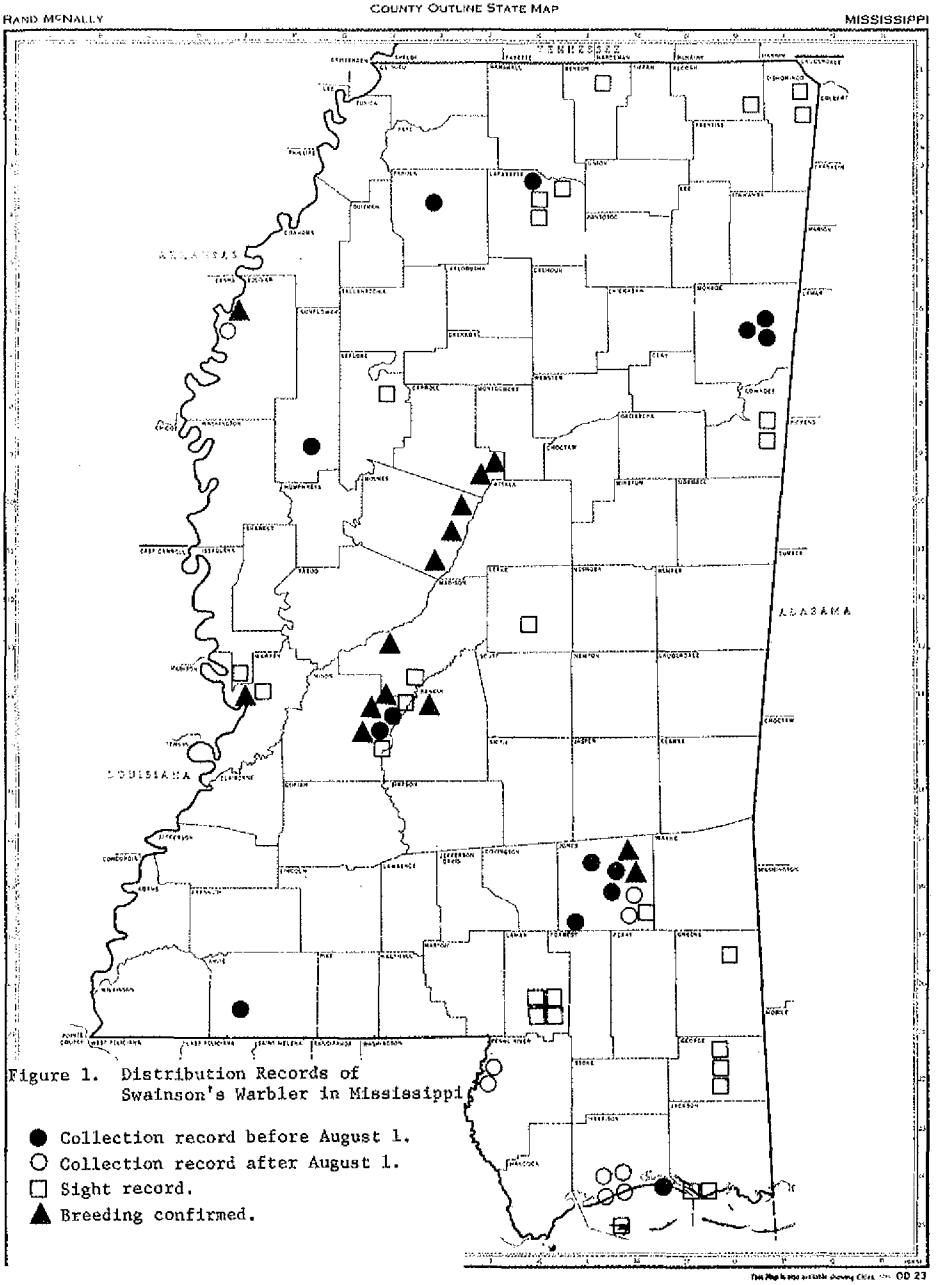

Figure 1. Distribution Records of Swainson's Warbler in Mississippi.

- ● Collection record before August 1.
- ○ Collection record after August 1.
- □ Sight record.
- ▲ Breeding confirmed.

walking streams on beaver surveys in widely separated areas of Mississippi. Systematic searches were made to locate active nests but none was found. I have found Swainson's warblers since then to be fairly common in breeding habitats along the Pearl and Big Black rivers and their tributaries, in the lower Yazoo River basin, and in the loess hills bordering the Delta region and extending southwesterly through Wilkinson County. I studied breeding habitat and behavior of the species particularly during the 1969, 1970 and 1971 breeding seasons, in an area at the headwaters of Clear Creek, five miles north of Bovina, Warren County, Mississippi.

Distribution and Habits

Near Ariel, in Amite County, on July 11, 1895 Andrew Allison collected what may be the first specimen record of the Swainson's warbler(Limnothlypis swainsonii) for Mississippi. The specimen(U.S. National Museum 263242♂)was probably taken from Beaver Creek Swamp which lies a few miles northeast of Ariel. Beaver Creek bottom still supports remnants of cane thickets (John H. Phares, pers. comm., 1971), the classic habitat nearly always associated with the presence of this bird. First bottom soils in this locality are of recent alluvium derived from the loessial uplands and classed by Goodman, et. al. (1917: 15-16) with the Vicksburg series. I have found breeding habitats in Mississippi to be confined to alluvial stream bottoms and to the narrow valleys in wooded ravines of the loessial bluffs bordering the Yazoo Delta and Mississippi River.

Burleigh (1945) collected three specimens of the Swainson's warbler at Gulfport, August 19, October 4 and 6, 1941, one immature,August 8, 1942 and one specimen on Deer Island, April 19,1943. From the Yazoo Delta region Vaiden(1948,p.63) reported a Swainson's warbler found dead by G. A. Thompson, Jr. on September 7,1947 on Old River Lake in Bolivar County. Vaiden(1940) collected a male specimen one-half mile south of Moorhead, Sunflower County, on July 17, 1939. Published sight records include those by Coffey et. al. (1941: 31) in Lowndes (June 22, 24,1939), Leflore (May 26,1940), and Benton County (April 27, 1941); Turcotte et. al. (1957) recorded sightings in Tishomingo County, April 26-28,and in Madison County,April 20, 1957. Phares (1958) and Turcotte et. al.(1959,1963,1971) reported sight records in Leake County, April 16,1958,Greene County, April 25,1959, Warren County, Bovina area,May 25,1963 and Issaquena County, June 5, 1971. Haberyan (1962) recorded

the earliest spring arrival date,March 31,1962 at Belle Fontaine Beach, Jackson County. Collection and sight records for this species in the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science further substantiate widespread distribution (Fig. 2.).

Breeding Habits

Breeding habitat discourages penetration by other than persistent and patient birdwatchers. The basic requirements are proximity to water, understory tree, shrub and vine tangles,a scattering of dead leaves,decaying vegetation, ground cover of water and shade tolerant plants and an almost-closed canopy of hardwood or mixed pine-hardwood trees. The river flood plain swamps or bottomland forests of this region are broken up into several types, all of which may be periodically flooded. On lower, poorly-drained flats of the first bottom, overcup oak and bitter pecan are predominant. Sweetgum, sycamore, water oak and hackberry are found on first bottom ridges which are slightly higher and deeper alluvial deposits. Large sweetgum and sycamore trees, living and dying cane thickets, greenbrier tangles,rank growths of nettles,ferns,jewelweed, spice-bush and other shade tolerant plants usually found on deep, alluvial soils are indicators of breeding habitat.

Actual nesting habitat is usually found on the slightly higher, deeper alluvium bordering stream banks, old stream runs or low ridges which support cane thickets or vine and shrub tangles.Cane is usually prominent on higher swamp ridges or stream banks along with greenbrier,low bushes and saplings or their combinations that actually support the nest. Nine of 17 recorded nests were supported by cane, 5 by low bushes or saplings and 3 by greenbrier.The nest site is usually in total shade screened from sight except at close view or within 20-30 feet(Fig. 3). Finding a nest requires slow, methodical searching ahead and at both sides for the nest structure which resembles clustered leaves suspended in fall or from overflow drift lodged on vegetation. Close scrutiny of all such clusters in or close to cane thickets is likely to yield a nest.

I associate the Swainson's warbler with the Kentucky and hooded warblers because all three are commonly found with overlapping breeding territories (Fig. 4). Also, the song of the hooded warbler is most like the Swainson's and the Kentucky warbler has similar chip notes.One can expect to hear or see the Louisiana waterthrush,prothonotary warbler,Carolina wren,

SWAINSON'S WARBLER
Limnothlypis swainsonii

Fig. 2

Collection and sight records in Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, Jackson, Mississippi.

Specimen Records:

County	Locality	Collector	Date	Cat. No.
Jones	BoguehomaSwamp Laurel	R. M. Freeman	Apr. 21,1938	Ab-594
"	Eastabuchie	" " "	May 29,1939	Ab-2251
"	BoguehomaSwamp Laurel	B.A.Bloodsworth	May 10,1939	Ab-2020
Hinds	Caney Creek Jackson	W. H. Turcotte	June 15,1939	Ab-2336
"	Caney Creek Jackson	" " "	Apr. 26,1940	Ab-3751
Monroe	GreenwoodSprings	H. L. Owens	May 23,1940	Ab-3959
"	" " "	" "	May 23,1940	Ab-3960
Panola	N. Batesville	R. M. Freeman	May 26,1939	Ab-2144
Monroe	Aberdeen Area	H. L. Owens	Apr. 14,1941	Ab-4609
Jones	BoguehomaSwamp Laurel	B.A.Bloodsworth	Sept. 3,1941	Ab-4679
"	BoguehomaSwamp Laurel	" " "	Aug. 19,1941	Ab-4680
"	Indian Springs	R. M. Freeman	May 16,1939	Mb-402
Lafayette	Tallahatchie R. bottom	Wm. Shepherd	Aug. 15,1938	Bb-509
Pearl River	SW-Poplarville	Percy Smith	Aug. 15,1938	Nb-129
" "	N-Poplarville	James Batson	Sept. 9,1939	Nb-260

Sight Records:

County	Locality	Observer(s)	Date	No. Seen
Lafayette	Abbeville	H.M.Stevenson	May 10,1944	1
" "	Oxford	" " "	May 16,1944	1
" "	N. part	" " "	May 6,1944	2
George	Upper Pascagoula R.	Clawson & Williams	July 2,1960	2 locations
Jackson	Belle FontaineBeach	Clawson & Williams	Apr. 7, 1961	1
Harrison	Cat Island Miss. Sound	Clawson & Williams	Apr. 1,1962	3
Hinds	Mayes Lake Jackson	Frances Wills & ChristineBerry	Apr. 8,1963	1
George	Pascagoula R.	Williams, Gee & Clawson	May 26,1962	several

(Continued on Page 7)

County	Locality	Observer(s)	Date	No. Seen
Lamar	SE-Lumberton	James Batson	Aug. 1,1940	2
"	" " "	" "	Sep.4,11,1940	several
"	" " "	" "	Oct. 7,1939	2
Alcorn	BurnsvilleArea	R. M. Freeman	June 17,1939	2
Tishomingo	" " "	Ernest Smith	June 23,1939	1
Jones	Boguehoma Area	B.A.Bloodsworth	June 25,1940	2

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Fig. 3. Nest site of Swainson's warbler at edge of canebrake, Bovina area, Warren County.

Fig. 4. Nesting habitat of Swainson's (back) and Kentucky Warbler (foreground) shown by arrows pointing to actual nests, Bovina Area, Warren County.

Fig. 5. Nest and 3 eggs, Bovina Area, Warren County, supported by cane and fallen branch.

wood thrush, white-eyed vireo,cardinal and Acadian flycatcher in Swainson's warbler breeding habitat. In the dense upper canopy the redstart,parula warbler and red-eyed vireo can be heard. In the loess ravines, near Bovina, Warren County, with bordering beech-magnolia bluffs,the worm-eating warbler frequents the upper canopy while feeding or sings from favorite perches in the lower part.

An interesting side observation is that I have found the morel mushroom growing in deep alluvium in Swainson's warbler habitat among dead cane close to cane thickets and large sweetgum trees.The morel appears between the time redbud and dogwood are in bloom and this is generally just a little before the Swainson's arrival in Mississippi.

Nests

The nest is built of compressed, dried or skelentonized, sometimes muddy leaves forming a bulky exterior structure that may include small twigs.The loosely formed outer structure is built in clockwise,spiral-fashion to form a cup and lined with such finer materials as dead grass or weed stems, rootlets,fine strips of bark, small cypress twigs and needles, pine needles, moss fibers, vine tendrils, flower stalks or hair.The earliest nest construction I observed at the Bovina area was on April 20,1969, with basal leaf structure complete but not lined. On April 23 the nest was complete with lining of rootlets added. Eggs were present on May 10 showing advanced incubation so the nest building process took about three days to complete.

Nest height above ground for 15 recorded nests ranged between 3 and 6 feet, averaging 4.2 feet. Frequent stooping in understory vegetation aids nest sighting.

Nest Records

On June 3,1940 I found and collected the first nest and 3 slightly incubated eggs in Big Black River Swamp east of Goodman in Holmes County.The incubating female was first noticed only when I almost touched the nest.She sat tightly until I deliberately moved to flush her from the nest.The nest was three feet above ground in blackberry briers in the edge of a hop=hornbeam thicket. Searches for nests were made systemically thereafter by walking parallel lines about thirty feet apart looking ahead and at both sides in territories where singing males were heard. Two more nests with three eggs each

were found and collected by Freeman and Turcotte on June 6th, 1940 in Carroll County, Big Black River Swamp east of Vaiden. I found and collected three eggs on June 10,1940 on Mule Jail Lake, Pearl River Swamp north of Jackson, Hinds County. F. A. Cook collected three eggs, June 11, 1940, from a nest I found in Pelahatchie Creek Swamp north of Luckney, Rankin County. I collected sets of three eggs each in 1941 at Big Black Swamp, Holmes County, near Pickens, on May 20; Caney Creek, south Jackson, Hinds County, on June 6 and 8. On June 9, 1941, I collected a set of four eggs in Big Black River Swamp north of Canton, Madison County. B. A. Bloodsworth collected two sets of four eggs each in the Boguehoma Swamp area east of Laurel, Jones County on June 6 and 9, 1941. Bloodsworth (Museum Field records, Nest No. 31) recorded a nest containing four young about five days old on June 9, 1941 in the same area as above. These young left the nest on June 14. M. G. Vaiden at Rosedale,Bolivar County,(Meanley, 1971, p. 16) reported finding nests prior to 1968 on the batture along the Mississippi River.

The earliest recorded egg record is a nest in the Bovina area, May 10, 1969, containing four eggs showing advanced incubation. The basal structure was completed April 20 and the lining of rootlets completed April 23. Six May egg dates of record are: 9 - 2, fresh; 10 - 4, advanced incubation; 20-3, fresh; 22 - 1, fresh; 29 -3, fresh and 31 - 2, fresh.June egg dates are: 3 - 3, incubation begun; 6 - 3, fresh; 6-4, 6-3, incubation begun; 6 - 3, fresh; 8 - 3, fresh; 9 - 4;9-4,fresh; 10 - 3, fresh; 11 - 3, advanced incubation. From these records it appears that early nestings occur before May 10. Most nesting occurs between May 10 and June 10.

Renesting by the same pair is indicated by two of five nest observations made in the Bovina area in 1970 and 1971. A nest containing 2 eggs on May 9, 1970, was empty on May 23. A second nest, built on the same cane stalk used for a nest the previous year, was completed and contained two eggs on May 31. Another nest found May 15,1971, contained 1 egg that was gone on May 22. A second new nest in the same territory was found May 22 with adults nearby. On May 29 this nest contained three eggs (Fig. 5). Ten of 17 egg records occurred between June 3 and June 11 indicating a peak of nesting and renesting occurring in late May and early June. Of 16 egg records, 11 com - pleted sets contained an average of 3.2 eggs.

Territorial Behavior

The Swainson's warbler arrives later than most other sum-

mer resident warblers but earlier than the transient Northern Warblers. The average date of arrival on breeding grounds is April 21 or about the time spring foliage is well out and producing shade. The singing of the male is the first and best clue to finding a breeding territory.The song (frontispiece) is a series of loud,clear whistles slurred at the ending notes of each phrase.The song resembles part of the hooded warbler song and might also be mistaken for some variations of the Louisiana waterthrush.The song and variations are distinctly different,however,due to the loud,ringing,musical quality. Both sexes have alarm notes(loud chips)and softer chip or zeep notes used for communication.The song is apparently used for territorial boundary definition and defense as well as communication since more singing is done during the period the female is incubating. Breeding territories appear to be quite small,approximately an acre or less in size.I have observed breeding territories in two connecting ravines in the Bovina area for three successive years and shifting or overlapping of territories occurs during successive nestings which is probably related to actual nest location. There are three prime cane patches in one territory within or near which all six nests have been placed. The male avoids singing near the actual nest site which I have observed to be inside but near the periphery of the male's territory. Territorial singing males respond to an imitation of their call.I have used tape recording playbacks to call up singing males and have had them sing repeatedly in close,open view, imitating or challenging their own recorded song. This behavior has been repeated ten or more times within the male's territory. I have also called up males by imitating their song myself.

The Swainson's warbler is neither a shy nor suspicious bird in its breeding haunts. With a little patience and perseverance singing males can be approached. It is just hard to see the birds because shadowy cover and their neutral colors combine to conceal them.Listen for and learn the song carefully, penetrate territory, search out nest habitat to find a nest and study territorial behavior around the nest. You will get to know well one of the species most sought after by life-listers and one least known by most birdwatchers.

Special thanks are due B. E. Gandy for duplicating museum records and helping in other phases of this work. We also thank R. M. Freeman and John H. Phares for their interest, contributions and encouragement in field work and writing of this article. The manuscript was typed by Pauline Davis and critically read by Jerome A. Jackson and John H. Phares.

Appendix

Scientific Names of plants and animals mentioned in the text.

Plants (after Small, J. K., Manual of the Southeastern Flora, 1933).

Beech, Fagus grandifolia
Blackberry, Rubus sp.
Cane, Arundinaria tecta
Cypress, Taxodium distichum
Dogwood, Cynoxylon floridum
Greenbrier, Smilax sp.
Hackberry, Celtis mississippiensis
Hop-hornbeam, Ostrya virginiana
Jewel-weed, Impatiens biflora
Magnolia, M. grandiflora, M. macrophylla
Mushroom, common morel, Morchella esculenta
Nettle, Urtica sp.
Oak, Quercus lyrata, Q. nigra
Pecan, bitter, Hicoria texana
Pine, Pinus sp.
Redbud, Cercis canadensis
Spice-bush, Benzoin aestivale

Birds (after American Ornithologists' Union Check-List of North American Birds, 5th edition, 1957 and its supplements).

Cardinal, Richmondena cardinalis
Flycatcher, Acadian, Empidonax virescens
Thrush, wood, Hylocichla mustelina
Vireo, red-eyed, Vireo olivaceus
white-eyed, V. griseus
Warbler, American redstart, Setophago ruticilla
Hooded, Wilsonia citrina
Kentucky, Oporonis formosus
Louisiana waterthrush, Seiurus motacilla
parula, Parula americana
prothonotary, Protonotaria citrea
worm-eating, Helmitheros vermivorus
Wren, Carolina, Thryothorus ludovicianus

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_____ 1940. Mississippi bird records. Wilson Bulletin, 52 (2).

Birding In The Rio Grande Valley

By Quentin B. and Frances L. Dowdy (A revision of a paper presented at the September 16, 1970 meeting of the Memphis Chapter, Tennessee Ornithological Society)

In the extreme southern part of Texas, supported by a subtropical climate and fertile river-deposited soils, are the remnants of a former jungle-like forest of trees, shrubs and vines. Dependent on this vegetation are a large number of birds and other animals, which are more commonly found in Mexico.

When this land is cleared and irrigated, it produces a variety and abundance of crops. For this reason much of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, biologically unique to the United States, has been converted to citrus groves and other forms of agriculture.However, a few tracts have been preserved for scientific study and the enjoyment of nature lovers.Three of these tracts are the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge,Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park, and the Anzalduas Tract owned by the World Wildlife Fund.

Compared to the agricultural lands, these parks and refuges are "islands of green." Thorny shrubs, climbing vines , and trees draped with Spanish moss form an almost jungle-like mass of vegetation. The Mexican influence is reflected in the names of some of the interesting and unusual plants of the region; such as, Granjeno (Grawn-haino), Anaqua (A-knock-wa) , Guayacan (Gwa-yah-kon), Guajillo (Gwa-hee-yo),Huiasche (Weesatch), Retama (Ray-tahma), and Tepehuaje (Tay-pa-wa-hee). Other plants common to the area are Torry Wolfberry, Mexican Persimmon, several species of mesquite and acacia, Hackberry, Texas ebony, and prickly pear cactus.

In addition to the many migrants,most of which are found in other parts of the country, several species are present as breeding birds only in this portion of the UnitedStates.These include the Mexican or Least Grebe, Black-bellied Tree Duck , Chachalaca,White-fronted Dove, Red-billed pigeon,Groove-billed Ani, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Kiskadee and Wied's Flycatchers, and Lichtenstein's Oriole. Quite rare, but sometimes to be found, are the Beardless Flycatcher, Yellow-green Vireo, Black-headed and Hooded Orioles,Varied Bunting and the White-collared Seedeater.

Other birds which may be seen during most or all of the year include thePauraque, Elf Owl,Tropical Kingbird,GreenJay, Lomita Wren(South Texas race of the Carolina Wren),Long-billed Thrasher,Bronzed Cowbird and the OliveSparrow.Other birds that are common but also found in other parts of the Southwest are the Harris' Hawk;Roadrunner;White-winged, Ground and Inca Doves;Ladder-backed and Golden-frontedWoodpeckers; Curve-billed Thrasher;Boat-tailed Grackle,and the Pyrrhuloxia. All of these, in addition to such old friends as the Mockingbird and the Cardinal. Those who are lucky may catch a glimpse of the Mexican Black Hawk, Gray Hawk, Jacana, Green Kingfisher, Ringed Kingfisher,Clay-colored Robin, or some other Mexican rarity.

As to where these birds can be found; some, such as the doves,the wood-peckers, Green Jay, Cactus Wren,the thrashers, and the Boat-tailed Grackles, everywhere. Green Jays and grackles are especially numerous around the picnic areas and campgrounds. During the summer months, the doves keep up an almost incessant cooing. Most abundant in the summer months is the White-winged Dove, with smaller numbers of Ground and Inca Doves. The latter are usually found around feeders at the Park or Refuge Headquarters. The White-fronted Dove is present in the summer, but may be more easily found during the winter when it is more noticeable because of the absence of the large number of White-wings.

The LeastGrebe can usually be found on the ponds at Santa Ana. A very good place is the ponds at the end of a short trail from the picnic area. Gallinules nest on these ponds , andRed-billed pigeons sometimes roost in the surrounding trees.

The Black-bellied Tree Duck is also at Santa Ana.Follow a short trail from Headquarters to North Lake. There are several nest boxes and a photo blind. In summer large broods of young can be seen,one parent in the lead followed by as many as 15 or more young,and the other parent bringing up the rear

At Bentsen-Rio Grande Park behind the old Park Headquarters, is a cultivated field where sometimes in Winter the White-tailed Kite may be seen. Chachalacas are very common both at Bentsen-Rio Grande Park and at Santa Ana. At Santa Ana signs warn you to watch out for Chachalacas in the road, where they like to take dust baths.

The most likely place to find the Red-billed Pigeon is in Anzalduas Park or the area owned by the WorldWildlife Fund which adjoins the park. The pigeons nested in the park in the Summer of 1970.

The Beardless Flycatcher and the Rose-throated Becard have also been found here,and the Yellow-green Vireo and the Varied Bunting are possible.

Groove-billed Anis are common in all three of the areas; but you have to look close to distinguish them from the much more abundant Boat-tailed Grackles.

Buff-bellied Hummingbirds are most likely to be found at Santa Ana. A map at Refuge Headquarters will have pins stuck in it to indicate the most recent sightings of this and other rarities.

The Green and Ringed Kingfishers may be seen along the river at Santa Ana or Bentsen Park; but they are more likely to be found further up the river in the vicinity ofFalcon Dam. The Green Kingfisher is present in small numbers all of the year. The best time is early morning. The bird will be perched on rocks or low bushes just below the dam. The Ringed Kingfisher nested this past summer on the Texas side just below the dam. The Green Kingfisher can also be found at Garner State Park several miles to the north.

The Scaled Quail is very common at Falcon Dam StatePark, and the Lesser Nighthawk can also be found there.

Tropical Kingbirds and Kiskadees are very common at both Santa Ana and Bentsen; also, most of the time at Anzalduas. The Long-billed Thrasher, a bird closely resembling our Brown Thrasher, is not as common as its curve-billed relative, but can usually be found by searching any of the brushy areas.

Lichtenstein's Orioles (like a Hooded Oriole, but larger; the sexes being almost alike), seem to prefer to build their nests at the end of a small branch overhanging the park roads. There were three active nests the Summer of 1970 in Bentsen Park. The Black-headed Oriole is very hard to find because of its retiring habits and shyness. The best place to look is in the picnic area at Santa Ana and the Ebony Grove at Bentsen Park.

After spending most of one day beating the bushes for this bird at Santa Ana on our last trip to the Valley,we gave up and resigned ourselves that this was one bird we would not see. The next morning at our camp at Bentsen Park, we were up at the break of day to start our day's birding, and what was sitting in a tree above our tent? A Black-headed Oriole. Later in the day we saw a Buff-bellied Hummingbird in the same tree.

The Hooded Oriole may be seen at any of these places.The Orchard Oriole is also present in small numbers.Mockingbirds, Cardinals, Curve-billed Thrashers, Cactus Wrens,and in winter Pyrrhuloxias, are found everywhere.

The Elf Owl nests in a utility pole just across the road from the old trailer parking area at Bentsen Park. Pauraques are very common. They can be seen and heard every night in the summer. In the winter they can be found by walking along the park roads just after dark and looking for their eye-shine with a flashlight. The eyes look like glowing embers in the darkness. Several species of owls may also be seen at night.

Another point of interest at Bentsen Park during the winter is the large vulture roost.This is on the dirt road from the camping area to the river. It is on the left of the road about one-half mile after leaving the pavement.

In addition to the interesting birds are a variety of animals,a few of which reach their northern limits in the Rio Grande Valley. Some of the species seen from time to time are the Opossum,Armadillo, Eastern Cottontail,Raccoon,Striped Skunk, Coyote and the Bobcat. Tropical species infrequently seen are the Mexican Ground Squirrel, Longtailed Weasel, Ocelot, Jaguarundi Cat, Resaca Rice Rat, and the Mexican Pocket Mouse. Also of interest are the many varieties of colorful butterflies and other insects to be found here.

If one has more time to spend in this part of the country, a visit to the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge several miles to the northeast is worth a visit. A variety of water, marsh, and other birds not present in the Valley are to be found here. Among them are the Caracara, White - tailed Hawk, Fulvous Tree Duck, White Ibis, Avocet, Black - necked Stilt, Olivaceous Cormorant, and many others.The Varied Bunting and Cassin's Sparrow are present on the World War II Gunnery Range which is part of the Refuge.

Returning home,stop at Aransas for the Roseate Spoonbill in Summer and the Whooping Crane in Winter.

If you are passing nearby Anahuac Refuge on the Upper Texas Gulf Coast is worth a stop.

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June Breeding Bird Survey - 1971

The sixth June Breeding Bird Survey for Mississippi covered a total of 16 survey routes. Participants were: I. S. Godfrey, M. A. Nichols,W. M. Davis (4),W.L. Whittemore, W. H. Turcotte,B. C. Grimm, B.B. Coffey, J.A. Jackson (2), D. M. Lewis(2), B. B. Aldridge and M.B. Blihovde. A tabulation - numerical ranking - (total birds seen or heard all Mississippi routes run) for the 1971 Survey is shown be - low for twenty most common species:

1. Redwinged blackbird
2. Common grackle
3. House sparrow
4. Bob white
5. Mourning dove
6. E. Meadowlark
7. Cardinal
8. Mockingbird
9. Blue jay
10. Starling
11. Indigo bunting
12. Common crow
13. Dickcissel
14. Yellow-billed cuckoo
15. Yellowthroat
16. Chimney swift
17. Cowbird
18. Carolina wren
19. Yellow breasted chat
20. Barn swallow

The dickcissel, Carolina wren and barn swallow appeared in the twenty most common bird list for the first time in 1971. The Kingbird dropped from the list for the first time since the Survey began. W. H. Turcotte

Jackson Audubon Chapter Meeting

On November 16, 1971 a meeting was held at Belhaven College in Jackson, the purpose being to solicit active members and organize a Jackson Audubon Society local chapter. Initial plans for the meeting were made by Miss Evelyn Tackett supported by Dr. Roy Reid and Mrs. Dudley Peeler, professors in the Belhaven College biology department. Mr. Robert Manns, Audubon's southeastern representative,was scheduled to attend but an ice storm in Atlanta disrupted his travel plans.

Mr. Richard Stokes presented a very excellent slide program and commentary on birds of the Everglades. Mr. Stokes was formerly Park Ranger, Everglades National Park, and is presently assigned to the recently established Gulf Islands National Seashore.

A total of 54 new members (comfortably over the initial 35 member requirement necessary for a new local chapter)joined the Audubon Society and hopefully will become active participants in affairs of the Jackson Chapter which is now being

organized. The Mississippi Ornithological Society welcomes this good showing of participation and interest in wildlife and the changing natural environment as reflected through the National Audubon Society and its philosophy.

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Organized April 30, 1955

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The Mississippi Kite and MOS Newsletter are included in all types of memberships. Individual copies of The Mississippi Kite, 50 cents.

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BIRD-WATCHERS ARISE!

by

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Bird-watchers arise! In this age of awakening awareness of the adverse effects of man's exploitation of the environment we are finally being recognized. The activists among us have been recognized in courts across the nation. They have captured public opinion that will make the environment an important issue in the 1972 elections. We are no longer the "little old ladies in tennis shoes", but rather,we are a sizable cross-section of American society. The following paragraph reveals something of the scope of our fellowship. It is excerpted from a preview of the 1970 National Survey of Hunting and Fishing and was presented last September by Daniel W. Slater of the U.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife at the American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City.

"We are particularly intrigued by the fact that the number of mandays of birdwatching,nature walking,and wildlife photography together totalled 847 million days in 1970, or nearly nine percent more than the total number of mandays of hunting and fishing. Further, the mandays of birdwatching were double those of hunting and were over three-fourths those of fishing. Nature walking days exceeded hunting by three-fourths and were two-thirds of fishing days. Although both birdwatching and nature walking are enjoyed by more women than men and by women more intensively,the contrasts are not great.These activities, then,are ones for fish and wildlife managers to conjure with!"

This surge of bird-watching interest is evidenced in Mississippi by the recent formation of Audubon chapters in Starkville and Jackson. If the interest is not new in Mississippi, it is at least newly surfaced to public attention.AllanCruickshank, in summarizing the sixty-fifth Audubon Christmas bird count(1964-1965) reported: "As usual,the sad lack of interest in birding in Mississippi was reflected in only one report from Moon Lake(Lula), and this count was initiated by the ever-enthusiastic Ben Coffey of Memphis,Tenn." Such a state of affairs is no more. In 1970-1971 there were six Christmas bird

counts in the state - perhaps there were even more this year. On another interest front over 700 Mississippians completed questionnaires in the Purple Martin survey we initiated this year. There are people interested in birds in Mississippi - let's cultivate that interest. We have a tremendous natural resource in our wildlife and we have a population that is ready and eager to learn about and enjoy this resource. I challenge you to seize this opportunity to share your interest and your knowledge of Mississippi birds with your friends and community. Tell your friends about the MOS; take them birding with you; bring them to our spring meeting. Offer your services to a local boy scout, girl scout, 4-H or other civic group - believe me, you're wanted.

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