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Front Cover: Tundra Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) near Sidon,
Leflore Co., Mississippi, January 1990.
Photograph by Betty Van Meek.

TRUMPETER SWAN IN BOLIVAR COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

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and

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On 10 January 1990 at about 2:00 p.m., Nona and J.C. Herbert saw two quite large white birds in a flooded field about one mile to the north of Mississippi highway 450 west of Choctaw, Bolivar County. They turned north on a gravel road 4 miles west of Choctaw to approach the birds more closely, although they were still about 0.5 mile from them and the birds were partly hidden from view by dead brush. At that time the Herberts identified the birds as Tundra Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*), which they had seen in the Mississippi Delta within the previous month.

One swan was noticeably larger than the other and it was supposed that the difference might be between male and female birds. Farther north and east along the same road, the Herberts found an extraordinary concentration of thousands of ducks and all three species of geese normally found in Mississippi. We believe that the swans arrived along with other waterfowl in conjunction with passage of a front on the night of 9-10 January. On 11 January two swans were present at the same site, and still at great distance from roads. The numbers of geese had fallen to about 1000, while most of the ducks had moved to a catfish farm about a mile west.

On the afternoon of 13 January, Mrs. Herbert went to the Lake Chicot State Park in Arkansas, where she told wildlife interpreter Don Simons about the swans. He went to the Bolivar County site on 14 January and discovered that the birds included one Tundra Swan and one Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*), rather than two Tundra Swans. At that time the birds were only about 110 yards from the gravel road, allowing good observation of the birds with 8.5 X 44 binoculars and a 15-60X spotting scope. The larger swan was longer-necked and had a minimally-sloped profile of bill and forehead, and a pattern of black facial skin reaching to the eye -- characteristics of the Trumpeter Swan. Simons also noted a reddish edge to the mandible and a kink in the neck not shown by the smaller Tundra Swan. The latter

bird showed a yellow spot in front of its eye, held its neck straighter, had a more concave bill shape, and did not have so much dark facial skin reaching the eye.

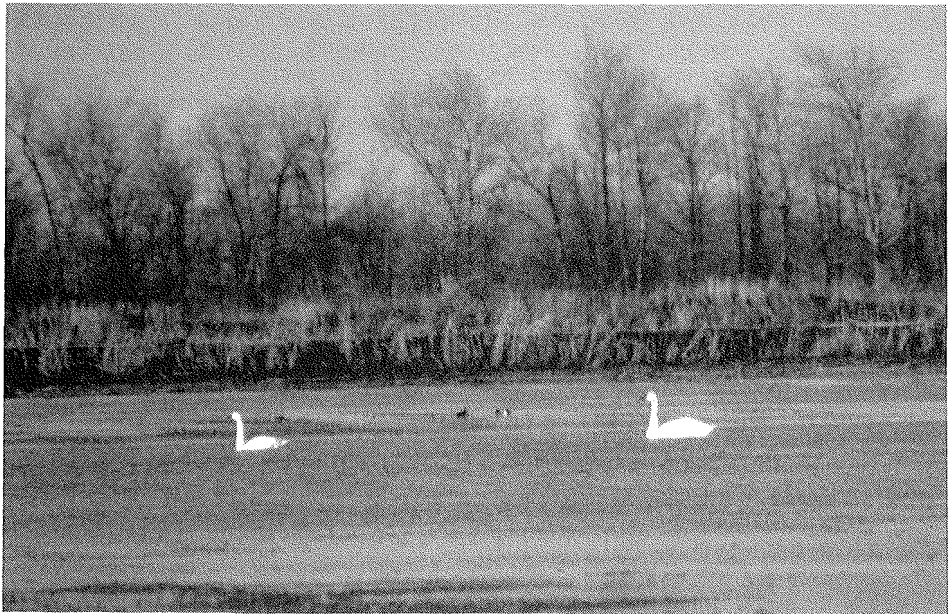
On 15 January the Herberts also found the swans near the road and were able to repeat Simon's observations and concur in his identification of the birds. W. Marvin Davis arrived at mid-afternoon, agreed with the identification, and took documenting photographs.

Over the next several days birders from several areas of Mississippi joined in the viewing. Because of the coverage by newspapers in Cleveland and Jackson, many persons from Bolivar County and the Delta, but also from the four surrounding states, came to see this "odd couple" of the swan world over the next several weeks. During early February, Betty Van Meek took the photos of the pair shown in Figures 1 and 2. The last sighting of the swans was at 3:30 p.m. on 10 February 1990. They had departed before 8:30 a.m. on 11 February.

The behavior of the birds seems worthy of note. They ate almost constantly and voraciously, seemingly feeding on sprouted soybean seeds and grasses in the flooded fields. Commonly they stayed in fields feeding, except for times when they flew to an area about one mile to the northeast. There they swam, bathed, and rested daily in a field with geese and ducks. On at least some occasions they left at dusk to spend the night on a new pond at the catfish farm one mile to the west. Both swans were heard by Herbert to call loudly at various times, as well as make low murmuring sounds when feeding together. The loud vocalizations of the Trumpeter were indeed a "trumpet" sound; for the Tundra they were a more "yodelling call."

A pair consisting of an adult Trumpeter Swan and an immature Tundra Swan spent June of 1989 together on Lake Lunby near Grand Forks, North Dakota (Berkey 1989). It seems possible that this could have been the same duo wintering together in Mississippi about seven months later. Berkey (1989) speculated that the five Trumpeter Swans found in the 1989 summer at three locations in North Dakota may have originated from flocks established in recent years at the LaCreek National Wildlife Refuge, South Dakota, and in Hennepin County, Minnesota.

Figures 1 and 2. The Trumpeter (larger) and Tundra (smaller) swans observed in Bolivar County, Mississippi, during January and February 1990.



James and Neal (1986) indicate that the Trumpeter Swan was extirpated from Arkansas, with no records for at least 70 years, but that it "formerly wintered well to the south of Arkansas including the Gulf coast and the Mississippi valley." Audubon is said to have shot one near the mouth of the Arkansas River, which is in Desha County, directly across the Mississippi River from Bolivar County. Other localities were in Crittenden, St. Francis, and Poinsett counties, all of which are in the Delta area of Arkansas just north of Bolivar County, Mississippi.

During January 1991, three immature Trumpeter Swans spent time at a farm pond near Heber Springs, Cleburne County, Arkansas (W.M. Davis, personal communication). Thus it seems possible that the species may again occur in Mississippi and observers need to exercise care in future identification of swans in the state.

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**PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION AND NEW SITES FOR THE COMMON
BLACK-HEADED GULL IN MISSISSIPPI**

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The first Mississippi sighting of the Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) at Grenada Dam in 1972, and one further sighting at the same place, were described by Davis (1986, Miss. Kite 16:13-16). Despite there being one additional sighting at Grenada Dam by J.A. Toups in January 1987, the species has not been documented for the state by specimen or photograph.

On 12 January 1991 a group of birders made an all-day search by boat for rarities among flocks of wintering gulls on the portion of Pickwick Lake that lies in Tishomingo County, Mississippi. At 4:00 p.m., Wilson sighted an adult Common Black-headed Gull among several hundred Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*) that were feeding actively in the area. Knight was able to locate the same bird, despite its being about 70 to 100 meters from the boat, by spotting the dark outer one-third of the underwing, which differentiates the Common Black-headed from the very similar Bonaparte's Gull. The bird was under observation for only 30 seconds before it was lost among the many other gulls. The record provided only the second site of occurrence for this species in Mississippi.

On 18 January 1991, another adult Common Black-headed Gull was located, this time at the outlet channel of Sardis Dam, by Davis. The bird was also seen on 24 January by Knight. Davis obtained one photograph which confirms the identification, although it is unsuitable for publication. The dark outer portion of the underwing called attention to the bird and is visible in the photograph. Copies of this slide deposited in the bird collections at Mississippi State University and the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science comprise the best current documentation for this species in the state. The Sardis Dam site, also a new one for the

species, is very similar to the locale at Grenada Dam, which lies 76 km to the south.

Also during the winter of 1990-91, an adult Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) was identified from a boat on Sardis Lake on 12 December by Knight and Vic Theobald, and an adult Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) was seen at the outlet channel of Grenada Dam on 15 January by Knight and Davis, found again by Knight on 15 February, and photographed on 16 February by Wilson accompanied by Terence Schiefer. In no previous season have all three of these rare, irregular species coincided in Mississippi. What the conditions were that made this season more favorable than usual for their occurrence is uncertain.

WOOD DUCK ATTEMPTS TO ENTER BLUEBIRD NEST BOX

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On 14 March 1991, I observed a female Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) as it investigated a bluebird house and was chased by Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*). I had erected the bluebird box near my home and within about two yards of the shore of a 70 acre lake in the southern half of Jones County, Mississippi. The area around the lake is a mixed pine and hardwood forest that has been logged in the past 10-15 years, so most of the trees are relatively young. There are very few mature hardwood trees in which cavities may develop, so natural cavity nesting sites in the area are scarce.

At 8:15 a.m. the female Wood Duck walked from the water to the post supporting the bluebird box, then flew to the top of the box. As it peered in the box entrance, which is 1.5 in. in diameter, a male and female Eastern Bluebird dove repeatedly at her. The Wood Duck left the post, but then twice tried to fly into the box entrance. She stood about 3 yards from the post and flew to the hole in the front of the box. Each time she would strike the front of the box with her head or bill and fall to the ground. This sequence of events lasted about 30 minutes. A male Wood Duck watched from the water during the first few minutes of this activity, but then joined the female on the ground near the box for the last 10 minutes.

After watching this encounter and the female Wood Duck's persistence, I built a Wood Duck box and placed it within 40 yards of the bluebird box. By 6 April Wood Ducks were incubating eggs in the Wood Duck box and bluebirds were incubating eggs in the bluebird box.

NESTING OF THE HOUSE FINCH IN DOWNTOWN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

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On 15 June 1991 we found and photographed two active nests of the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) on the top floor of the Holiday Inn Downtown parking garage in Jackson, Mississippi. Two nests from which young had already fledged and a nest under construction were seen and photographed at the same time. Seven or eight adults were at the site of the active nests. One or more of the adult males were singing or calling near the nests.

The first active nest examined contained four young in early pinfeather stage. They were being fed by the male, apparently by regurgitation, since no food was visible when the adult visited the nest. The second active nest contained one egg. The female flushed from the nest twice when approached. A brightly colored male and a less colorful male accompanied this female while she remained in the nest vicinity. Both males and the female made alarm calls and were visibly agitated by our disturbance at the nest.

All five nests were cup-shaped and built inside welded wire covers over 2-bulb fluorescent light fixtures attached to the concrete ceiling and about 4 m above the floor (Figure 1). All nests were made of weed stems forming the basal structure. The lining was made of finer grasses. Some bits of paper, plastic wrapping, string, and other materials were worked into the outer parts and rim. Nests that had fledged young and the active nest with young had the rim covered and built up with dried or fresh droppings from the young. The nest with one egg was new and clean of fecal matter. It had a mummified fledgling dangling from a string attached to the nest. Two streamers of synthetic fabric ribbon also hung from this nest. The nest under construction had the basal structure completed, but no lining. The two older nests contained the dried green stems and immature seed capsules of peppergrass (*Lepidium virginicum*). Peppergrass is common around untended, vacant spaces near parking lots and buildings in the downtown area. Seed of this plant matures

Figure 1. Young House Finches begging from their nest in the wire enclosure of a fluorescent light fixture.

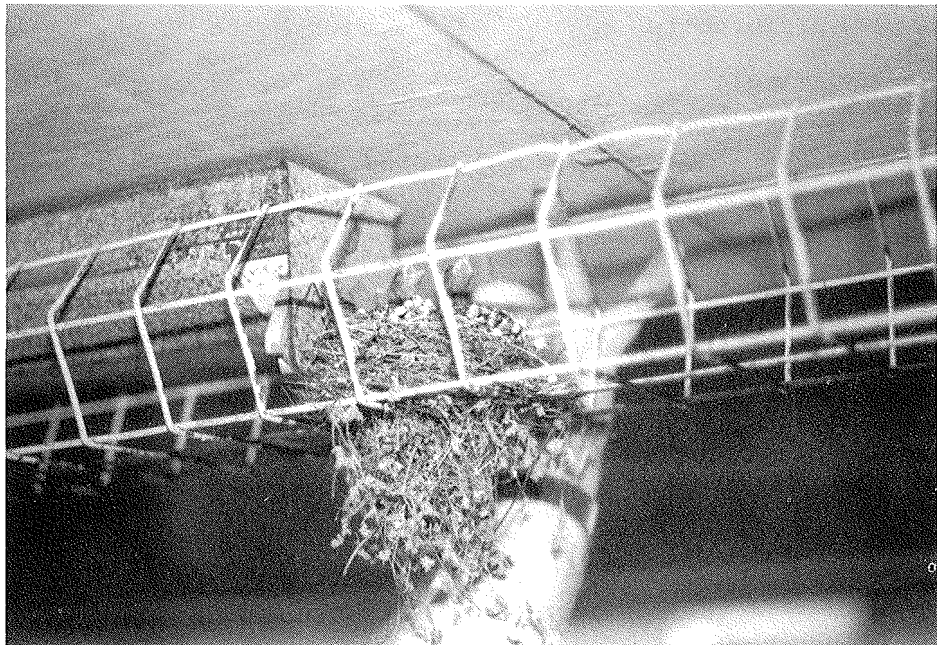
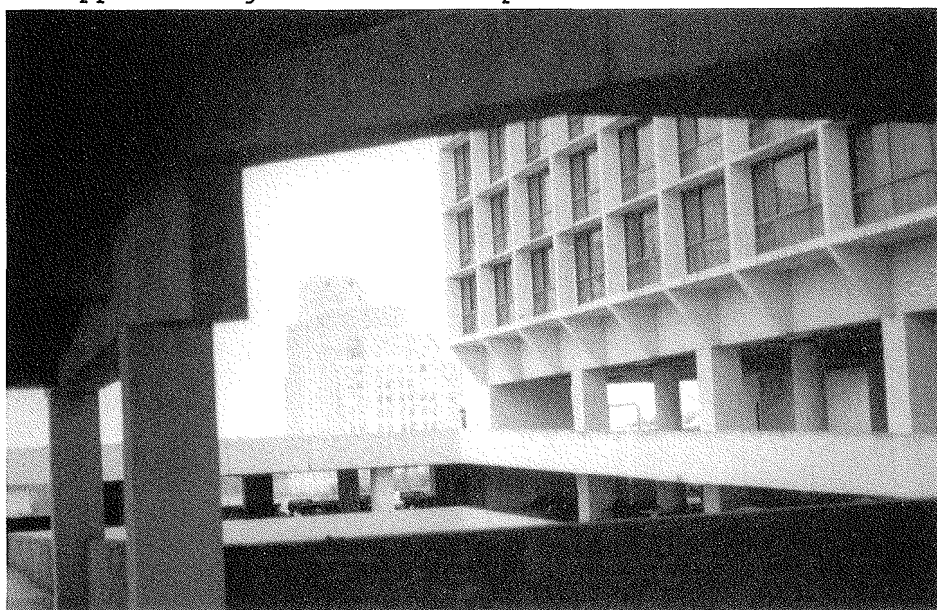


Figure 2. Site of an active House Finch nest on the ceiling of the Holiday Inn Downtown parking garage. The nest was at the upper left just out of the photo.



in early spring and its use suggests that the two nests were completed early in the spring. The nest with one egg was apparently an earlier nest that had been cleaned and renovated. Both the nest with young and that with an egg were infested with mites.

House Finches were seen by Hutto and others in the summer of 1990, and vacant nest was seen at one of the light fixtures on the downtown parking garage. Active nesting was not observed in 1990. The top floor of the nesting location is open on all sides (Figure 2). The lower floors are effectively enclosed with metal screens to prevent entry by birds. The Holiday Inn swimming pool is on the roof of the parking garage.

The House Finch first appeared as a winter resident in Mississippi in 1980 (Jackson 1981). The first breeding record was a fledgling being fed by an adult on 11 July 1986 in Starkville (Jackson et al. 1986). A single male was observed at a feeder in Jackson from 14 July to 20 August 1984. A photograph of that bird was taken by Vic Duvic (Jackson et al. 1986).

House Finches have become common winter residents at bird feeders throughout Mississippi. From winter through late March 1991, House Finches appeared at numerous feeders in the Jackson, Mississippi, area. Turcotte saw flocks numbering from 12 to more than 30 at different locations in Richland. About 12 to 15 used his bird feeders regularly and a flock of about the same numbers fed on blossom buds of three nearby plum trees.

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THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

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