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Contents

BREEDING BY THE BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER IN SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI	
....C. Ray Chandler, Mark S. Woodrey, and J. Michelle Cawthorn	2
GRAIN ELEVATOR SUPPORTS WINTER BARN OWL NEST	
....James L. Key	5
RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER PREDATION ON A GREEN ANOLE	
....Gregory A. Smith and Jerome A. Jackson	7

Front Cover: "Branchling" Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*), at nesting colony at "Gallinule Pond," Pascagoula River marsh, Jackson County, Mississippi, July 1994. Photo by Jerome A. Jackson.

**BREEDING BY THE BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER
IN SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

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The Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) is a common summer resident in the eastern United States, nesting south to central Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana (Lowery 1978, Imhof 1976, American Ornithologists' Union 1983). In Mississippi, nesting by the Black-and-white Warbler is rare in the southern portion of the state. There are no breeding records for coastal Mississippi (Toups and Jackson 1987) and the species is apparently absent in summer on the adjacent coastal plain. In this note we report successful breeding by the Black-and-white Warbler in DeSoto National Forest of southern Mississippi and describe the habitat used by the birds.

On 31 May 1992 we found a male Black-and-white Warbler at the terminus of Forest Service road 335A in the Black Creek District of DeSoto National Forest. The bird was singing along the edge of a regenerating clearcut bordered by pine-oak woods approximately 33 km SSE of Hattiesburg and 6 km WSW of Brooklyn, Forrest County, Mississippi (32° 45' N, 89° 15' W). The bird was singing vigorously -- a high, sibilant *wesee wesee wesee* -- and approached closely in response to "spshing." It was a male, distinctively patterned above with bold black and white stripes, a black-and-white striped crown, black eyeline, and blackish auriculars. The underparts were white, patterned with a black throat and prominently streaked sides. Wing coverts were distinctly edged with white (creating a double wing-bar). A hint of contrast between brownish-black flight feathers and the black of the greater coverts suggested a bird in its first summer (Pyle 1987), but this was inconclusive. The bird resumed singing almost immediately and a brief search revealed no other individuals.

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The male continued to sing actively at the same location on the morning and evening of 1 June, but could not be located on the morning of 2 June. We searched again on the afternoon of 4 June and found the male singing sporadically and foraging (in a distinctive creeping style) along the trunk and branches of a large oak growing near the edge of the clearcut. This time a thorough search revealed a female Black-and-white Warbler in a thin line of standing trees approximately 30 m farther into the clearcut. She was similar in plumage to the male, but with a whitish face (somewhat grayish on the auriculars) and white underparts (pale streaking on the sides). Chipping constantly (a sharp *pit*), she moved nervously up and down the line of trees, suggesting a nest or young in the area. The male also approached, but showed less agitation than the female. Despite the behavior of the adults, we failed to locate a nest or young.

On the morning of 5 June, we found the female (and later the male) feeding two recently fledged young. The fledglings were being fed along the edge of the same line of trees where the female was so agitated on the previous day. Because the fledglings were very small (their wings and tail barely long enough to sustain flights of 2-3 m), they undoubtedly fledged nearby within the previous day or so. Their plumage was generally gray-brown, somewhat lighter on the underparts, with inconspicuous coarse streaking. There was a hint of a buffy eyeline and wingbars. The fledglings perched quietly in low vegetation, moving only occasionally in response to the female's movements. Although she chipped nervously, the female continued to feed the fledglings. The male appeared much less frequently and only fed the fledglings a single time over the course of 15-20 minutes. The entire family moved away into thicker vegetation in the clearcut.

The habitat in which all the sightings were made is somewhat atypical for breeding Black-and-white Warblers. The warblers' activities were concentrated at the corner of a regenerating clearcut approximately 25-50 m from the edge of a dry pine-oak woodland. Virtually all trees had been cut with the exception of a large oak (in which the male sang and foraged) and the thin line of trees along a shallow ditch where the fledglings were found. The rest of the clearcut was covered with a thick, but patchy growth (approximately 1-3 m in height) of oaks (*Quercus* spp.), pines (*Pinus* spp), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), and blackberries (*Rubus* spp.). The Black-and-white Warblers were never seen beyond the edge of the clearcut. Other birds in the immediate area included

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*), Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*), Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*), Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*), and Carolina Chickadee (*Parus carolinensis*).

Although the Black-and-white Warbler is unquestionably an early fall migrant, some portion of late summer records along the coast of Mississippi (e.g., Toups and Jackson 1987) and adjacent states could represent the movement of birds away from relatively local breeding areas such as described here. Unfortunately upland areas away from the immediate coast receive relatively little attention from birders during the late spring and summer. More field work is needed in DeSoto National Forest and adjacent areas to clarify the status of the Black-and-white Warbler as a breeding bird in southern Mississippi.

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GRAIN ELEVATOR SUPPORTS WINTER BARN OWL NEST

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Nesting Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) have been documented within the United States for every month of the year (Otteni et al. 1972, Marti 1991). In Mississippi, I have found Barn Owls nesting in the central and eastern portions of the state throughout the year, although they show a peak in egg-laying during January and February. These regions are relatively diverse in habitat, with mixed pine (*Pinus* spp.) and hardwood stands, pasture, and croplands. Although most Barn Owl nests have been located in areas rich in croplands, there are other prey-supporting habitats available during the periods when fields are bare.

In west Mississippi, in the Delta region, available habitat is almost exclusively cropland, and I have found nesting efforts to be much more seasonal. Egg-laying occurs almost exclusively within the December to February period. These are often the harshest months in Mississippi, but these nests usually produce fledglings in March, April, and May, when crops begin to flourish and prey abound. Late fall and winter offer little more than barren fields, and I have found only one Barn Owl nest initiated just prior to that period.

This nest was located at "Big River Seed Company," a grain elevator in Cleveland, Bolivar County, Mississippi. The clutch of five eggs was laid in a small room at the top of the complex, above the silos. Egg-laying began in early October 1991, and I saw three fledglings there on several occasions during January 1992. Although the elevator is located within the city limits of Cleveland, hundreds of acres of cropland are readily accessible to the birds for late spring and summer foraging. During winter, however, these lands are barren. Pellets at the site suggested that the owls were feeding almost exclusively on sparrows (Emberizinae) and blackbirds (Icterinae). House mice (*Mus musculus*) also occasionally occurred as prey.

Various sparrows and blackbirds were abundant among the spilled grains within the site, and I suspect that house mice were also plentiful. It appears that while other Barn Owls were leaving the area for the winter, this pair took advantage of the elevator and its associated readily attainable prey. Barn Owls again successfully nested at this site during the winter of 1992-93.

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RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER PREDATION ON A GREEN ANOLE

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At 16:30 on 13 April 1994, we observed an adult male Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) attack, kill, and eat a green anole (*Anolis carolinensis*) on the Mississippi State University campus in Oktibbeha County. The weather was clear and warm. The habitat was not optimum for either species -- a large, closely mowed field with very widely scattered small trees. The woodpecker seized the lizard from the trunk of a 5-meter-tall laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), and, while holding it in his beak, thrashed it against the tree repeatedly. It temporarily wedged the lizard in the fork of a small branch and swallowed the lizard's tail (which had been severed from the body). With the lizard in its beak, the woodpecker then flew about 100 meters to a pecan tree (*Carya illinoensis*), where it again beat the lizard against the tree until it appeared lifeless. Then the Red-bellied lodged the lizard in a branch fork and began to pull it apart and eat it in several pieces. The woodpecker then flew again, out of our view, with some remains of the lizard.

Dennis (1951) also observed a male Red-bellied Woodpecker capture and kill a green anole. His Florida observation was of a woodpecker that flew to the ground to capture the anole, then back to a tree where the lizard was wedged into a "depression." The anole was then swallowed whole, head first. Beal (1911:50-51) also mentions finding anole remains in two of 271 Red-bellied Woodpecker stomachs examined.

The "thrashing" behavior we observed was also reported by Dennis (1951), but not in association with vertebrate prey. He observed a male Red-bellied slap a large caterpillar against a tree limb for "some time" before eating it.

In his classic study of the food habits of woodpeckers, F.E.L. Beal (1911) reported that the diet of the Red-bellied Woodpecker included about 31% animal matter and 69% vegetable matter. The animal matter was mostly insects, including an average of about 10% beetles, 6% ants, and about 6%

Orthoptera (grasshoppers, crickets, and roaches). Bent also found the bones of a small tree frog in one stomach from Florida. More recent observers document the opportunistic nature of Red-bellied Woodpecker feeding habits. Kilham (1963) describes how they sometimes store food for later use, and Brackbill (1969) documented their taking eggs of other birds.

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