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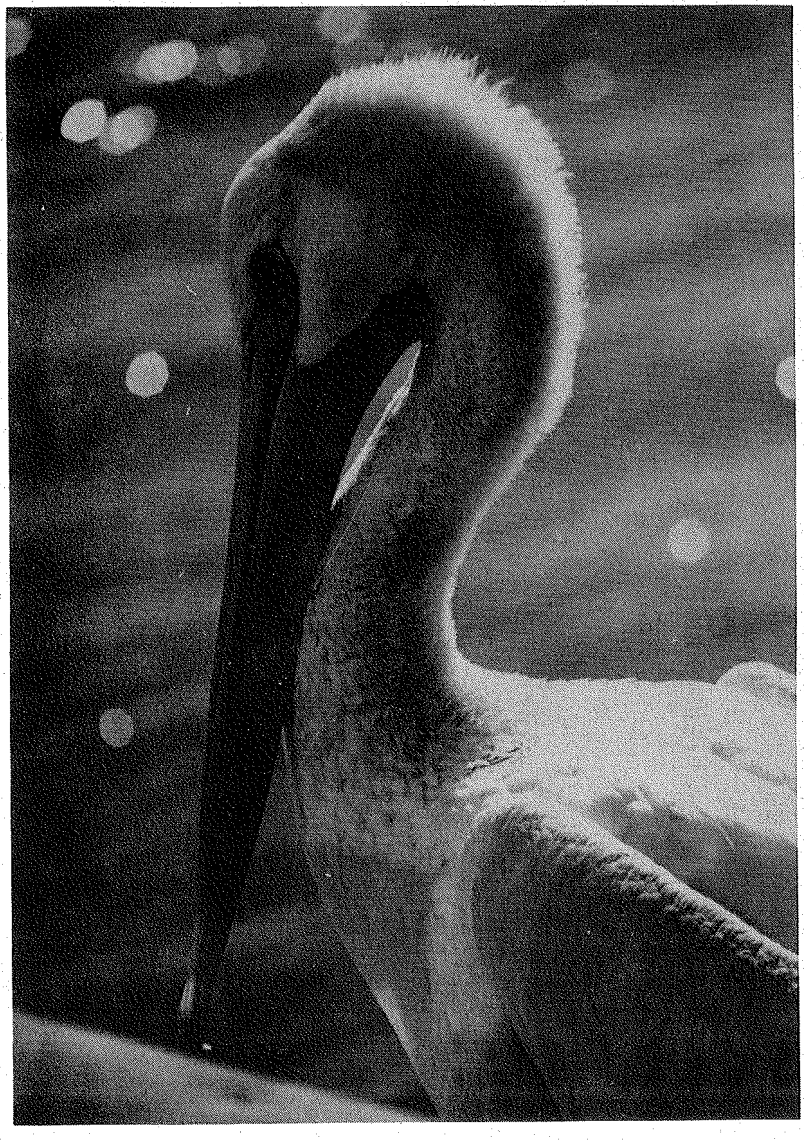

A Periodical Published by the Mississippi Ornithological Society to Record and Further the Study of Mississippi Birdlife.

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Contents

COVER: American White Pelican at Okatibbee Reservoir, Lauderdale Co., Mississippi. (Photo by Jerome A. Jackson.)

SANDERLING FEEDING ON CARRION

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While attending the Inland Bird Banding Association meeting at Biloxi, Harrison County, Mississippi, I walked along the beach of Mississippi Sound in front of the Seashore Methodist Assembly at about noon on 22 October 1994. I noticed two birds, a Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) and a Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), standing near an amorphous mass on the tide-line. The gull was picking at and apparently feeding on the mass. When the gull occasionally walked away a few feet, the Sanderling then hurried to the shape and picked and swallowed bits from the same spot. After watching about ten minutes while they repeated this action several times, I approached the flotsam. It was a dead hardhead catfish (*Arius felis*) about six inches long, a species commonly washed up on the Biloxi shore.

The gull flew off as I neared, but the Sanderling pattered off about 15 feet and waited. The gull had pecked through the skin and opened it up to eat the soft interior flesh. The Sanderling had also been feeding at this spot. When I walked on, the Sanderling ran back to the fish and continued to feed on the flesh. This appears to be an unusual sighting of a Sanderling feeding on carrion.

The food of Sanderlings is generally described as minute crustaceans and mollusks, marine worms, sand fleas, flies, and other insects and larvae bared on the beaches by receding waves or secured by vigorous probings in the sand (Bent 1927, Hall 1960:199), although Myers (1988) notes that it responds opportunistically to rich food resources. An additional rich and important seasonal food picked off the beach by myriads of spring shorebirds, including Sanderlings, is the eggs of the horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) deposited by these arthropods in the sand (Bolton et al. 1994). I have seen no mention of carrion as food.

In addition to this unusual view of a Sanderling feeding on carrion, its action in immediately using a food source exposed by a gull is a nice example of symbiotic feeding (Van Tyne and Berger 1959:253) -- in this case the symbiotic feeding would properly be termed commensal, since only the Sanderling benefited and the gull was not harmed by the association.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank J.A. Jackson for his suggestions for this note.

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A JULY RECORD OF A MALE RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD IN STARKVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

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At about noon on 27 July 1994, as I was passing our kitchen window in rural Oktibbeha County, northeast of Starkville, Mississippi, a coppery flash caught my eye when I glanced at a hummingbird feeder. I recognized immediately that the bird I was looking at was not a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) by the brilliant "new penny" flash of its gorget. I immediately thought of the Anna's (*Calypte anna*) or Rufous (*Selasphorus rufus*) hummingbird, but had to consult a field guide to confirm identification of the bird as an adult male Rufous Hummingbird. By the time I had confirmed the bird's identity, it had moved to a second hummingbird feeder on our front porch.and was defending it against about four Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Later on the same afternoon, Margaret Copeland came to observe the bird and confirmed my identification.

Just after daybreak on 28 July, the Rufous Hummingbird was again at our feeders. Terry Schiefer also observed it and at about 09:30 Bob and Martha Sargent of Trussville, Alabama, captured the bird, banded it, and marked it with a white dab of "liquid paper" on the head. When it was released, the Rufous flew about 40 m to a magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) where it preened. The bird was last seen at the feeder by Bob and Martha Sargent at about noon on 28 July.

We feel very fortunate to have had this visitor, even for this brief time. This episode certainly heightened our awareness of the possibility of such a visit and makes our viewing of the hummingbird feeders much more than casual.

[The Rufous Hummingbird was first reported in coastal Mississippi in December 1960 (Toups and Jackson 1987) and the species has been regularly seen in southeast Louisiana for many years. In the past decade there have been several records of Rufous or possible Rufous (*Selasphorous* sp.) from Mississippi, including many banded by Bob and Martha Sargent. While many records have been from coastal areas, additional north or central Mississippi records provided through the efforts of Bob and Martha Sargent include birds banded at Cleveland, Starkville, near Louisville, and Brandon. Other north Mississippi records of *Selasphorus* sp. include sightings in Oxford, Horn Lake (DeSoto Co.), Kosciusko, and Lake Ferguson (near Greenville) (Purrington 1989; T. Schiefer, pers. Comm.). This record of an adult male banded at Starkville is the earliest summer record among these reports.-- *JAJ*]

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WARBLING VIREOS POSSIBLY BREEDING IN ISSAQUENA COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

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Warbling Vireos (*Vireo gilvus*) apparently maintained territories throughout the 1994 breeding season in cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) plantations near Fitler in Issaquena County, Mississippi. During the first year of a three-year study on the productivity and survival of Neotropical migrant songbirds in mixed bottomland hardwood forests and cottonwood plantations in the Mississippi alluvial valley, we regularly observed Warbling Vireos while conducting point counts and searching for nests in the cottonwood plantations. Our four 10 ha cottonwood plantation study plots are situated in 4-year-old stands in the Fitler Managed Forest, which is owned by James River Timber Corporation. Although Warbling Vireo males seemed to be actively engaged in territorial defense through mid-July, we were unable to verify active Warbling Vireo nests on any of the four plots.

Tomlinson (1977) also reported Warbling Vireos throughout the breeding season in 3-6-year-old cottonwood plantations in Bolivar County, Mississippi, in 1975 and 1976. He estimated from 0 to 3 Warbling Vireo territories per 10 ha on his study sites. Tomlinson's study sites were approximately 100 km north of our study sites.

Lowery (1974) noted that Warbling Vireos favor large trees, particularly cottonwoods, along river banks. In a summary of available information on

Warbling Vireos, Hamel (1992:253) describes the birds as being found "strictly in open mature hardwoods; restricted in the South to open hardwoods along rivers and large streams; do not occur in forests, but only where hardwoods line streams and rivers in open country." DeGraff et al. (1991:382) described special habitat requirements of the Warbling Vireo as being "scattered deciduous trees or wooded streamsides." Both DeGraff et al. (1991) and Hamel (1992) indicated that Warbling Vireos would not be found in mixed bottomland hardwood forests, as was the case in our study and that of Tomlinson (1977). Young cottonwood plantations, however, also seem to meet the Warbling Vireo's habitat requirement for open deciduous forests.

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THE FIRST ANNUAL MISSISSIPPI COLONIAL WATERBIRD COUNT

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Knowledge of wildlife numbers and population trends is essential for sound management. The abundance of game animals is monitored through hunter check stations, Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) coo counts, American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) display censuses, midwinter waterfowl counts, and other techniques. We count nongame land birds and other birds using breeding bird surveys, breeding bird censuses, Christmas bird counts, spring migration counts, midwinter eagle counts, hawk watches, MAPS stations, standardized point counts as established through the Partners in Flight program, and general bird watching. The International Shorebird Survey counts shorebirds at concentration points and several states have annual or sporadic censuses of colonial nesting waterbirds.

Mississippi has at least minimal monitoring for each of these bird groups except the colonial waterbirds. Although some colonial waterbird population data exist for Mississippi (Jackson and Jackson 1985, Jackson et al. 1979, Keller et al. 1984, and Portnoy 1977) there is no systematic, statewide data base. In 1994 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science coordinated the first Mississippi Colonial Waterbird Count (MCWC). The ultimate objectives of the MCWC are to determine (1) the locations of waterbird colonies in Mississippi, (2) the species composition of each colony, and (3) the number of nesting pairs of each species each year. In this report I provide some of this information as a summary of the first year efforts of the MCWC.

METHODS

The MCWC is a cooperative program that relies on a statewide cadre of volunteers to do most of the counting. Standard data sheets were distributed to cooperators and a fixed count period, 1-19 June, was established, although counts made during any part of the breeding season were accepted.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service counted colonies from a fixed-wing airplane on two days in the Delta counties and Claiborne County. The National Park Service conducted a one-day aerial count on the coast. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, traveled the entire Mississippi portion of the Mississippi River by boat to count Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) colonies.

In some cases the number of nests were counted, but this usually was not possible. Most counts were based on estimates of the number of nests or the number of adults present, using the assumption that one adult was attending each nest at any given time. Generally aerial counts are not as accurate as counts made from the ground, The count period was selected to measure colony size during the peak nesting of as many species as possible, however, early nesting species, such as the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), were likely past their peak.

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

Twenty-three people participated in data collection. Most are dedicated amateurs interested in the welfare of colonial waterbirds. The few professional biologists who participated did so as an extra duty that, with one exception, was not part of their normal responsibilities. In this first year of the MCWC, participants had to find the colonies as well as census them. Colony location will continue to be an important task for future counts. Observers were lacking for large areas of the state.

WATERBIRD POPULATIONS

Sixty colonies were located and 18,954 breeding pairs of 12 species were reported (Table 1). Specific localities and data/observer are on file at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science and with the Vicksburg Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Cattle Egrets (*Bulbulcus ibis*) were the most abundant species and Least Terns occurred in the most colonies (Tables 2 and 3). Nesting Tricolored Herons (*Egretta tricolor*) were found only in the Fitler Colony in Issaquena County. The Fitler Colony also had the only recorded nesting White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) and Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). Yellow-crowned Night-Herons (*Nyctanassa violacea*) were found nesting only at the Mule Jail Colony in Hinds County. Black Skimmers (*Rynchops niger*) nested only at two coastal colonies, Long Beach Colony in Harrison County and Horn Island Pass Colony in Jackson County. Least Terns nested only on the coast and on the Mississippi River. The interior population nested at 34 locations (an estimated 1,070 pairs) on the Mississippi River, 17 colonies in Mississippi waters, 15 in Arkansas, and two in Louisiana adjacent to Mississippi.

The Pearl River Refuge Colony in Madison County was the largest colony in the state, with 5,826 breeding pairs of four species, including 5,240 Cattle Egret pairs. In the Delta, Fitler was the largest and most diverse colony with seven species and 1,637 breeding pairs. The Gulfport East Colony (Harrison County) was the largest coastal county, with 900 pairs of Least Terns and pairs of Black Skimmers. No colonies were found in Hancock County, which conforms with the findings of previous coastal surveys (Jackson and Jackson 1985, Jackson et al. 1980, Keller et al. 1984, Portnoy 1977).

In this first year of the MCWC, many colonies (but an unknown number) were missed. Counting effort was highest in the Delta counties and on the coast, but even in these areas coverage was not complete. Only the coast has any historical data to use for trend analysis and those are incomplete. From 1976-1984 Least Tern nesting on the coast averaged approximately 4,300 pairs (Jackson and Jackson 1985), but J.A. Jackson, J. Dubuisson, and G. Hopkins reported only 2,076 pairs in 1994 (Table 2). No other tern species were found nesting on the coast in 1994. From 1976 to 1979, nesting by other tern species was irregular (Jackson et al. 1979). The 73 pairs of Black

Skimmers are also within the historical range of variation in nesting activities in coastal Mississippi. In future years we hope to enlarge the cadre of volunteers, achieve more complete coverage of the state, and improve the quality/uniformity of estimates.

Table 1. County/Regional Summary for the 1994 Mississippi Colonial Waterbird Count.

	Number of Colonies	Number of Species	Number of Pairs
Statewide	60	12	18,954
Delta counties (including MS. River in MS)	24	10	10,278
Mississippi River (in AR or LA)[a]	17	1	454
Coastal counties	11	3	2,157
Adams Co.	3	2	110
Calhoun Co.	1	2	31
Claiborne Co.	1	1	50
Hinds Co.	1	2	8
Jefferson Co.	1	1	40
Madison Co.	1	4	5,826

[a] Least Tern colonies on the Mississippi River adjacent to Mississippi, but in Arkansas or Louisiana.

Table 2. Species Summary for the 1994 Mississippi Colonial Waterbird Count.

SPECIES	NUMBER OF PAIRS	NUMBER OF COLONIES	LARGEST COLONY
STATEWIDE			
Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)	125	6	50
Great Blue Heron	843	10	350
Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)	1,533	6	800
Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)	549	5	250
Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)	2,351	6	1,000
Tricolored Heron	1	1	1
Cattle Egret	10,094	4	5,240
Black-crowned Night-Heron	1	1	1
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	3	1	3
White Ibis	235	1	235
Least Tern	2,692	25	900
Least Tern[a]	454	17	85
Black Skimmer	73	2	53

[a] Colonies on the Mississippi River adjacent to Mississippi, but in Arkansas or Louisiana.

Table 3. Species Summary for Various Regions of Mississippi for the 1994 Mississippi Colonial Waterbird Count.

SPECIES	NUMBER OF PAIRS	NUMBER OF COLONIES	LARGEST COLONY
DELTA COUNTIES			
Anhinga	120	4	50
Great Blue Heron	800	6	350
Great Egret	1,513	5	800
Snowy Egret	497	3	250
Little Blue Heron	11,771	5	1,000
Tricolored Heron	1	1	1
Cattle Egret	4,854	3	3,750
Black-crowned Night-Heron	1	1	1
White Ibis	235	1	235
Least Tern	486	14	220
Least Tern[a]	454	17	85
COASTAL COUNTIES			
Great Blue Heron	8	2	5
Least Tern	2,076	8	900
Black Skimmer	73	2	53
ADAMS COUNTY			
Great Egret	20	1	20
Least Tern	90	2	80

Table 3. Continued.

Species	Number of Pairs	Number of Colonies	Largest Colony
CALHOUN COUNTY			
Anhinga	1	1	1
Great Blue Heron	30	1	30
CLAIBORNE COUNTY			
Snowy Egret	50	1	50
HINDS COUNTY			
Great Blue Heron	5	1	5
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	3	1	3
JEFFERSON COUNTY			
Least Tern	40	1	40
MADISON COUNTY			
Anhinga	4	1	4
Snowy Egret	2	1	2
Little Blue Heron	580	1	580
Cattle Egret	5,240	1	5,240

[a] Colonies on the Mississippi River adjacent to Mississippi, but in Arkansas or Louisiana.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Participants in the 1994 MCWC were Robert W. Alexander, Ben Blackwell, Nick Blanton, Rick M. Cummins, Maurice V. Duvic, Janet T. Dubuisson, Buddy Ethridge, James P. Hooper, Gary W. Hopkins, Jerome A. Jackson, Bette J.S. Jackson, J. Calvin Lunceford, Gene C. Knight, Shannon V. Knight, Larry E. Marcy, Keith M. McCartney, Harold A. Morrow, Allan J. Mueller, Charles Reitan, John P. Rumancik, Mary P. Stevens, Carrie A. Straight, and Jeff Terry. Mark Woodrey reviewed this paper and assisted in coordination of the counts.

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FALL NESTING OF KILLDEERS IN MISSISSIPPI

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On 16 November 1988, we discovered, captured, banded and color-banded three Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) chicks that were accompanied by two adults near an apartment complex in Starkville, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi. At capture, the chicks weighed 11.1, 13.0, and 13.1 g, weights characteristic of chicks 1-2 days old in east Mississippi (JAJ and BJSJ, unpublished data). Following banding, the adults led the chicks towards an adjacent open area and they were not seen again.

A second brood of fall-raised Killdeer chicks was observed by Malcolm Hodges on 11 December 1988 at the Starkville Sewage Lagoons about three kilometers from site of the earlier brood discovered. These chicks were not the same ones, however, since they were not banded. Two chicks, one nearly adult size and one appearing about 3/4 adult size were accompanied by two adult Killdeers as they foraged over a mud flat.

Bette Jackson (Schardien 1981) had previously found adults tending chicks in Mississippi only as late as 18 August. Townsend (1929) reported egg dates only into early July. Imhof (1976) reported an egg date only as late as 12 June and downy young as late as 14 July for 60 Killdeer nest efforts in Alabama.

The summer of 1988 was characterized by drought conditions in the southeastern U.S. followed by near tropical weather continuing well into the fall. We suspect that this weather combination is likely the cause of the unusually late nesting efforts of these Killdeers.

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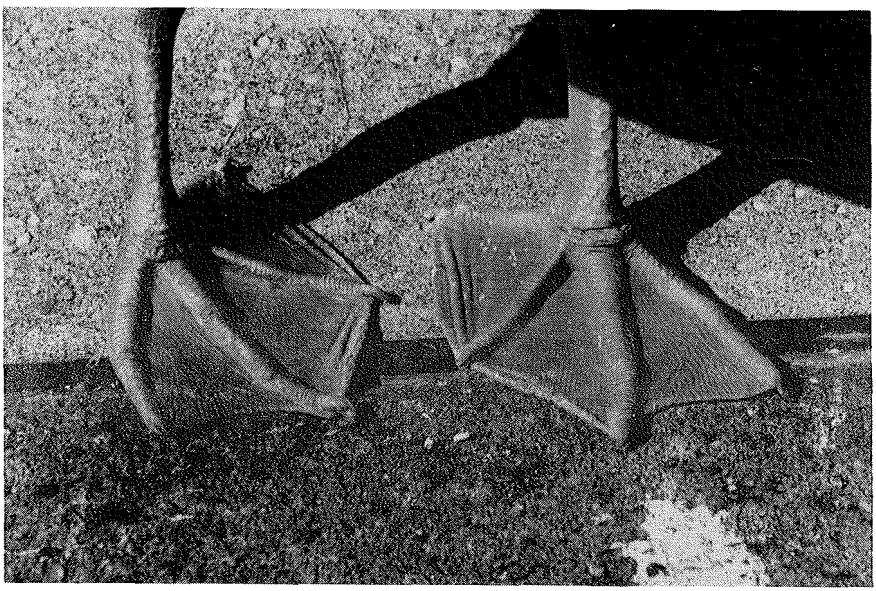
CAN YOU IDENTIFY THESE FEET?



All members of the traditional bird Order Pelecaniformes -- the pelicans, boobies, gannets, cormorants, anhingas, frigatebirds, and tropicbirds -- are characterized by having "totipalmate feet." That is, unlike any other birds, all four toes on each foot are connected by webs. In spite of this similarity among these birds, recent DNA evidence separates the pelicans from these other birds and allies them with the Shoebill, a strange big-billed, stork-like bird from Africa that does not have totipalmate feet. By the way, these are the feet of the American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) that is featured on the front cover of this issue.--*JAJ*.

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Mississippi Ornithological Society
Organized 30 April 1955

Officers

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