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## WHITE IBIS—A NEW BREEDING BIRD IN ALABAMA

By JAMES E. KEELER

For the first time in the history of ornithology, the White Ibis, *Guara alba*, has been found nesting in Alabama. Although these birds have been known to breed in north Florida for many years, no one interested in birds had ever reported seeing their nests in Alabama until May, 1956.

During early May a report reached the Department of Conservation that a tremendous colony of "white cranes" were nesting at Southfield Lake in north Baldwin County. The birds were described as being fairly large white birds with black wing-tips and long downward curved bills. To an ornithologist this was like a pirate finding a chest of gold. Although the birds themselves are fairly commonly seen in the southern half of Alabama during the summer and early fall months, their nests could be considered the "find of the year" in the bird world.

A trip was made to Southfield Lake on May 30, to verify this report. At this time an estimated 7,000 nests located on a small island were seen. From a distance the trees and bushes on the island appeared to be covered with snow. As the boat neared the island the "snow" turned out to be 10,000 or more adult White Ibis sitting on nests and perching on limbs. The air around the colony was flecked with white as the birds made their way to and from their feeding grounds.

A constant whistling soon became evident, as we neared the island, caused by thousands of nestling birds. This odd sound never ceased as long as we were on the island and in all probability continues on and on throughout the daylight hours during the duration of the nesting season. The sound would be enough to drive a person crazy if he had to listen to it for days on end. Oddly enough the adult birds rarely emitted a sound unless we approached too close to them.

The island containing the nesting colony is approximately four acres in size and is composed chiefly of hardwood trees, button bushes and a jungle of vines. Only about two acres of the island is used by the birds for nesting. The majority of the trees and vines contained very few leaves since the birds had stripped and used them for nest construction.

Upon reaching the island, we found that nests were located in just about every conceivable place possible. A few nests were even found built on the bare ground. The majority of the nests ranged from three to twenty feet above the ground while others were located in the very tops of the trees. One small tree contained sixty-four nests.

The initial survey revealed four other species of birds nesting within the ibis colony, however, they were neither as plentiful nor as conspicuous. During May 30 and 31, sixty-five nestling White Ibis were banded as well as four Snowy Egrets, three American Egrets, thirteen Yellow-crowned Night Herons and six Little Blue Herons. The Little Blue Herons were the next most common nesting bird.

The great majority of the ibis nests contained four eggs or newly hatched young. It was decided that the proper banding time would be in about two weeks. The U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Bird Banding Office was notified and 2,000 bands were received. It was noticed that when the nestlings became large enough to band they would leave the nests when approached and would climb out of reach. A method was devised to catch these birds by using the old fashioned chicken catcher, which was a wire hook that would hold a chicken by the leg. It was found that the chicken catchers would not work if the birds were caught by the leg. This caused them to grip the limbs very tightly with their feet and would have caused a great many broken legs. We found that by catching the young birds around the neck with the wire hook they would relax their grip and would be lowered without injury for banding.

A banding expedition was organized for June 14. The party consisted of Dr. Oliver Austin, Jr., Dr. Julian Dusi, Thomas Imhof, Wayne Colin, Walter Beshears, Jr., and the author. The trip up the Alabama River from Boatyard Lake to the cabin site at Southfield Lake was completed in about an hour. From there the necessary equipment was carried about one-fourth of a mile to the lakesite. Through the courtesy of Bill Wiggins, member of the Southfield Hunting and Fishing Club, two boats were available for our use on the lake.

Little time was lost in getting to the island. Upon reaching the island the party split up into groups of threes. Two men would catch the active nestlings

and the third man would open the bands and place them on the young birds' legs. Without the use of the wire catchers fastened to long cane poles, it would have been impossible to catch and band many of the young birds. The nestling birds were so agile that we soon found it unnecessary to replace them in the trees but would drop them on the ground where they would run to a bush or vine and climb it with the dexterity of a monkey, using both feet and their long curved beaks to gain leverage. It was almost unbelievable how readily they could catch hold of a twig or vine and climb. A young bird could be tossed at any bush or vine and would instantly grasp it with feet and bill and soon right itself and climb away.

The actual banding operation certainly could not be called pleasant. With thousands of adult and nestling birds using this small area, every vine and limb was covered with reddish-colored fecal matter. With hundreds of birds above us at all times it appeared to be raining red ochre. We soon learned by experience never to look up. The ground was actually red with the droppings, caused by the digested remains of crayfish, which comprises a large part of the bird's diet.

During the afternoon we banded 1,200 nestling birds before it became time to leave. Never were there six dirtier men when we left the colony. Fresh air and clean surroundings were very much appreciated.

Since we had 800 more bands on hand another expedition was arranged for June 21. This party consisted of Thomas McKinney, Department of Conservation Staff Photographer, Reynolds Thrasher, Lloyd Crawford, James Stinson, Roy Colquitt, and the author. We soon found that using the remaining 800 bands was going to be hard work since the young birds had grown so large that they would not only climb out of reach of the wire catchers but could now jump from one bush to another. We spent the entire afternoon chasing and catching 800 young birds. We had reached our goal in banding 2,046 young White Ibis. We learned later than only 716 White Ibis had ever been banded before.

The White Ibis can be distinguished from the Herons and Egrets in having a long decurved bill; pink bill, face and legs, and black wing tips. It is the only "crane like" bird with black wing tips with the exception of its larger cousin, the Wood Ibis.

The diet of the White Ibis consists of aquatic in-

sects, crayfish, mollusks, worms, small fish, frogs and various other small animals. Their feeding places are usually mud flats where they wade in shallow water, sweeping their bills to and fro and occasionally probing in the mud and soft sand.

The young birds are dull grayish-brown with the rump, base of tail and underparts white. They do not assume the adult plumage until they are two years of age. The White Ibis is a wandering bird in the late summer months. Usually the young of the year wander farther north than the adults. During the fall and winter months the birds migrate to Central and South America. It is hoped that by banding a portion of these birds from year to year that more will be learned concerning their life histories and movements.

The actual number of birds banded as a result of the three trips to Southfield Lake was 2,077. Of this number, 2,046 were White Ibis, fifteen were Yellow-crowned Night Herons; eight were little Blue Herons; five were Snowy Egrets; and three were American Egrets.

State of Alabama, Department of Conservation  
Montgomery, Alabama.

## QUAIL FEEDERS ATTRACTIVE TO MANY KINDS OF BIRDS

By ARNOLD O. HAUGEN, Leader

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and

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Artificial feeders operated in quail management studies at the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge near Decatur, Alabama, proved attractive to a number of species of birds and mammals. A list of birds observed at the feeders was compiled during a 2-year period (1952-1954). It is presumed that such birds as wrens and warblers were attracted by the insects that frequented the feeders and not by the cracked corn provided.

Thirteen feeders were placed in ground cover at various places on 652-acre Flint Creek Island and were operated from February, 1952, through December, 1954. The area for a distance of about 3 feet around the feeders was kept free of vegetation during the second year of the study by treating the ground with polybor-chlorate. Birds in general made extensive use of the corn, but they did not make much use of the commercial turkey feeds substituted for the corn at the end of the study. The cost of cracked corn used amounted to \$0.79 per feeder per month. A maximum of 6 gallons of corn was taken from one feeder in one month. This is about twice the average monthly feed utilization and is the result of heavy feeding by squirrels at feeders located in a squirrel habitat. In general, the most feed was taken from January through July, with the least amount used in October and November.

The study area was managed primarily for geese by Refuge personnel. The feeders were used by Research Unit personnel in an attempt to determine their value for quail. The population of quail on the area was not increased by supplying artificial feed. The winter carrying capacity remained low during the study, roughly 10 to 12 quail per 100 acres.

\*Jointly sponsored by the Alabama Department of Conservation, Agricultural Experiment Station of the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

## USE OF QUAIL FEEDERS BY BIRDS AT FLINT CREEK ISLAND

Species and Relative Use*	Season of Use
Bobwhite quail, <i>Colinus virginianus</i> , 3	All year
Mourning Dove, <i>Zenaidura macroura</i> , 3	All year
Flicker, <i>Colaptes auratus</i> , 2	All year
Blue jay, <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i> , 2	All year
Crow, <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i> , 2	All year
Tufted titmouse, <i>Parus bicolor</i> , 2	Mostly winter
Carolina wren, <i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i> , 1	Fall
Mockingbird, <i>Mimus polyglottos</i> , 3	All year
Brown thrasher, <i>Toxostoma rufum</i> , 3	All year
Yellow-throat, <i>Geothlypis trichas</i> , 1	Summer
English sparrow, <i>Passer domesticus</i> , 3	All year
Meadowlark, <i>Sturnella magna</i> , 2	Mostly winter
Red-wing, <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i> , 2	Spring-summer
Rusty blackbird, <i>Euphagus carolinus</i> , 2	Fall
Cowbird, <i>Molothrus ater</i> , 2	All year
Cardinal, <i>Richmondia cardinalis</i> , 3	All year
Blue grosbeak, <i>Guiraca caerulea</i> , 1	Spring
Indigo bunting, <i>Passerina cyanea</i> , 2	Spring-summer
Towhee, <i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i> , 3	All year
Savannah sparrow, <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i> , 1	Winter-fall
Grasshopper sparrow, <i>Ammodramus savannarum</i> , 1	Summer
Slate-colored junco, <i>Junco hyemalis</i> , 3	Winter
Chipping sparrow, <i>Spizella passerina</i> , 1	Winter
Field sparrow, <i>Spizella pusilla</i> , 3	All year
White-crowned sparrow, <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i> , 3	Winter-spring
White-throated sparrow, <i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i> , 3	Fall-winter
Fox sparrow, <i>Passerella iliaca</i> , 1	Fall-winter
Swamp sparrow, <i>Melospiza georgiana</i> , 1	Winter-spring
Song sparrow, <i>Melospiza melodia</i> , 1	Fall-winter-spring

\*Indicated degree of relative use: rare—1, occasional—2, common—3.

ANHINGA RECORDS FROM NORTHERN  
ALABAMA

By THOMAS Z. ATKESON

Howell's "Birds of Alabama," now badly out of date, lists the snake-necked Anhinga, or Water Turkey, as occurring only in the southern half of the State and gives no positive breeding records. Actually, these birds must occur, at least locally, throughout the State and definitely breed here.

Wheeler Dam, on the Tennessee River, was completed in 1936 and the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge was established on a part of the resulting reservoir in 1938. While refuge bird records were kept, beginning in the early summer of 1939, no Anhinga were noted until 1950. Either these birds failed to find the new reservoir until then or escaped notice, probably the latter.

A large nesting colony of Great Blue Herons and American Egrets was present in the Beaver Dam Swamp arm of the refuge in 1950. On April 27 of that year, the writer accompanied a group of Florence State Teachers College students on a visit to this colony. The group was headed by Gordon Cole, then a Biology professor at the college—now a T.V.A. biologist. Cole noted two Anhinga nests, with the adult birds sitting on them, and observed at least four adults. Nests were some forty feet above the surface of the swamp in large Tupelos. The colony was revisited on April 30, 1951, and at least one pair of nesting Water Turkeys was present then.

There have been no further nesting records, but the birds have been noted regularly each summer since and probably continue to breed in the vicinity. Records have come from the Beaver Dam Swamp and White Springs vicinities of the refuge and from the Beulah Bay and Swan Creek localities west of the refuge, all in the southern edge of Limestone County. Sight records have come from a number of good observers, including L. S. Givens, Eugene Cypert, H. H. Grammer, E. A. Byford, Thomas A. Imhof, Wayne Colin, and David C. Hulse. Due to the unique appearance of these birds, making misidentification unlikely, no collecting has been considered necessary.

April 27 remains the earliest sight record, obviously late, since they were incubating at that time. These

birds have never been seen later than July 27, despite efforts to establish later records. Cole reports that they nest regularly on Seven Mile Island, in the Tennessee River near Florence, in company with great blue herons and American egrets.

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Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge  
Decatur, Alabama.

## PRESENT STATUS OF THE ALABAMA BIRD LIST

By THOMAS A. IMHOF

The present Alabama list contains 291 species whose presence in the state is supported by specimens. An additional 39 species have been recorded from Alabama on less substantial evidence. Thirteen of the 291 species have been added to the list since January, 1955. This list of specimens follows:

Reddish Egret, Dauphin Island, July 23, 1955, Ralph L. Chermock.

Glossy Ibis, Gulf Shores, May 30, 1956, Burt L. Monroe, Jr.

Fulvous Tree Duck, Chuckfee Bay near Mobile, November 7, 1956, W. Walter Beshears, Jr.

Mottled Duck, Dauphin Island, September 23, 1955, W. Walter Beshears, Jr.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Wheeler Refuge, September 14, 1955, Ernest Byford.

Black-necked Stilt, Dauphin Island, October 7, 1956, Lovett Williams.

Gray Kingbird, Dauphin Island, August 24, 1956, Henry M. Stevenson.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Dauphin Island, October 5, 1956, Thomas A. Imhof.

Sprague's Pipit, Roberts Field, Birmingham, October 17, 1956, Thomas A. Imhof.

Black-thr. Gray Warbler, Dauphin Island, October 7, 1956, Robert T. Lynn.

Lincoln's Sparrow, Mun. Airport, Birmingham, November 3, 1956, Thomas A. Imhof.

Smith's Longspur, Robert's Field, Birmingham, January 17, 1956, Thomas A. Imhof.

Lapland Longspur, Airport, Gadsden, January 21, 1956, Thomas A. Imhof.

During the same period, the following species were added to the state list as sight records:

Harlan's Hawk, Birmingham, December 26, 1955, Imhof.

Hudsonian Godwit, Dauphin Island, August 19, 1955, Chermock.

Parasitic Jaeger, Alabama Point, March 11, 1955, Imhof.

Western Tanager, Dauphin Island, October 6, 1956, Russell & Willis.

Evening Grosbeak, Gadsden, April 16, 1956, Clark, Snead, et al.

For the following 12 species, there is evidence a little stronger than just a sight record:

Whistling Swan—recorded at Wheeler Refuge on 16 mm color film with telephoto lens by Chester Markley.

White-fronted Goose—specimen taken near Coden, not preserved.

Snow Goose—many specimens taken, none preserved.

White-winged Scoter—specimen taken in Tennessee Valley, not preserved.

Black (American) Scoter—three specimens taken in Mobile Bay, none preserved.

Mississippi Kite—specimen taken by Gosse in 1858, not preserved.

Swainson's Hawk—bird banded in Saskatchewan, recovered in Selma.

Whooping Crane—specimens shot many years ago, too late now.

Sandhill Crane—specimens shot many years ago; Federal law prohibits any collecting. There is no law against taking any pictures.

European Woodcock—specimen taken in Autauga County, not preserved.

Mourning Warbler—specimen picked up on roadside at Decatur by Hulse; too badly crushed to preserve.

Red Crossbill—specimens taken, not preserved.

The following 22 species complete the hypothetical list of 39:

Red-throated Loon, Wilson's Petrel, Gannet, Scarlet Ibis, Flamingo, European Widgeon, Am. Rough-legged Hawk, Long-billed Curlew, Northern Phalarope, Roseate Tern, Alder Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, Kirtland's Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Western Meadowlark, Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak, Redpoll, Am. Tree Sparrow, Harris' Sparrow, Snow Bunting.

If anyone thinks that insisting on a preserved specimen is too high a standard, let him remember that Ornithology is a science, and that 15 of the writer's own sight records are included in the 39 above. No one should be able to point his finger at us and say that our state list is padded. We will have the satisfaction of knowing that our state list has a good foundation. The information herein given will, I hope, prove the stimulus for a sharp reduction in the list of species without a specimen; already reduced by 10 birds this year alone. I want to thank the collectors and their assistants for forwarding the science of Ornithology in Alabama. I hope they received as much satisfaction as I did.

307 38th Street  
Fairfield, Alabama.

## NOTES OF INTEREST

### Towhee Feeding Behavior

On July 1, 2 and 3, I observed a female Towhee feeding a young Field Sparrow. This was the only female Towhee I had banded to date. On July 2, the banded female was seen feeding one of her own young. These feedings were viewed in our yard, at a bird feeder, and on the ground.

The second nest of this same Towhee was discovered in a red cedar, six feet nine inches high, on July 18, 1956.—Harriet Wright.

### Barn Swallow Antics

This summer, while I was in Connecticut, a pair of Barn Swallows built a nest on a rafter in the woodshed of our house.

From then on we were constantly entertained. Our poor yellow cat was under constant attack. No sooner would he start across the yard than the birds would take turns swooping at his head like the proverbial dive bomber. Finally, we all became targets. Our heads were saved only by a hair's breadth.

One day we saw three pretty heads protruding from the top of the nest. The next day they were gone. The whole family disappeared for the next five days. On the sixth day, the parents returned without the young, apparently ready to start another brood. Never again did we see the young birds. The first day they stretched their wings, they left their nest never to return and must have also been left to their own resources by their fickle parents.—Betty D. Worley.

### Tufted Titmouse Storing Food

This past summer we placed watermelon seeds and pulp where they were available to the birds in our yard. On two separate occasions, a Tufted Titmouse was observed to make several trips to the watermelon seed supply and then to a Chinaberry tree. At the tree the bird would securely lodge the seeds under a loose end of bark, sometimes hammering them into position with his bill.—Julian L. Dusi.

## Baird's Sandpiper at Gulf Shores

Baird's Sandpiper, *Psiobia bairdi*, is an unusual migrant on the Alabama Gulf Coast. On September 15, 1956, a female was collected by the writer along the coastal strip, west of Gulf Shores.—Julian L. Dusi.

## Ruddy Turnstone's Feeding Habits

The Ruddy Turnstone is classically listed as feeding on the smaller invertebrate animals living in the intertidal zone of a beach. It was rather surprising to find a group of eight of these birds and several other shore birds feeding well back from the water along a small inlet near the beach strip at Gulf Shores. It appeared as though these birds were feeding as scavengers on a pile of dead crabs and fish which some fisherman had left. Closer observation, however, revealed that they were feeding on maggots which were very numerous on the dead animals. This probably offered a much better food supply than their usual source and explains what seemed to be rather unusual behavior on their part.—Julian L. Dusi.