

Stevenson, H. M. 1975. "Lesser Black-backed Gull Summering in Florida." Florida Field Naturalist, 3:22.

Woolfenden, G. E. and Schreiber, R. W. 1974. "Lesser Black-backed Gulls in Florida." Florida Field Naturalist, 2:20.

Woolfenden, G. E. 1973. "Florida Region." American Birds, 27:606.

614 Fairpoint Drive
Gulf Breeze, Fla. 32561

MIGRATORY HOMING ABILITY AMONG

PURPLE MARTINS

Richard K. Crawford

The Purple Martin (Progne subis subis) has been recognized for several centuries as one of North America's most beneficial birds. As early as the late 1700's, Audubon observed martins nesting in gourds erected by Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians in the states of Alabama and Mississippi. Many theories and tales have been created about this beautiful bird that so eagerly nests in man-made sites. One such theory is that the same birds return year after year to the same nesting cavities, and it is this theory that I have chosen to examine more closely.

Question

Do Purple Martins return to the same breeding colonies year after year in sufficiently large numbers to justify the previously mentioned homing theory?

Terms

Local - young bird of present hatching year incapable of sustained flight.

Adult - any breeding bird, whether first or second year plumage.

Methods

Research began in March, 1976, and is still being conducted. Both adults and local birds were banded with aluminum bands provided through the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland. Forty-two birds were banded in the year 1976 at three locations in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. The localities are as follows: (1) Lake Lurleen State Park, approximately eight miles (12.80 kilometers) WNW of Northport, Alabama; (2) and (3) are pair colonies located in the Riverdale subdivision (Tuscaloosa), 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) north of the Black Warrior River and .4 miles (.64 kilometers) east of U. S. Highway 82.

The adult birds were obtained while roosting through the use of an extremely large cone-shaped net, constructed of nylon sheer and fastened to the end of a ten-foot pole. The birds were selected strictly at random; however, at the end of the first banding period (March to June, 1976), the birds' sex ratio broke at exactly 50% males and 50% females. Two local birds were also obtained, but these were not included in the overall sex ratio tabulations.

Results

On February 12, 1977, the first martins of the 1977 breeding season arrived. On Thursday, February 17, studies resumed. Banding is still being carried out, with an expected goal of 200+. The first returns are also beginning to filter in. However, in no way are they to be considered conclusive.

The only returns so far have been females. This is not to say that males do not return to the same colony. It is too early to say that any return is anything more than accidental. In a recent conversation with Charles R. Brown, it was noted that in a similar study being conducted in North Central Texas (where only local birds are being banded), the exact opposite results have occurred. There are at least two more years of study before any conclusions can be obtained. However, this limited information does tend to provide new angles from which to explore this fascinating creature, the Purple Martin.

If anyone in the West Alabama area has a colony they would like to include in the study, I will be happy to try to fit it into my schedule.

90 Woodridge
Tuscaloosa 35401

BARN SWALLOWS BREEDING IN SOUTHEAST ALABAMA

Brent Ortego

Within the last 15 years, the northern breeding population of Barn Swallows has been extending its range southward in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama (Stewart 1964, 1965, 1968; Holmes 1974; Kennedy 1974). In Alabama, Imhof (1975) illustrated that the northern breeding population of Barn Swallows nested throughout the state, except in the Piedmont, the Southeast and the lower tier of counties. (Barn Swallows nesting in lower Mobile and Baldwin Counties are from a southern breeding population.) This range expansion of the northern population has been associated with man's building activities (bridges, culverts, etc.) in areas of suitable habitat.

I located no previously published accounts of this species nesting in southeast Alabama and southwest Georgia. During May and June, 1977, I examined all bridges located over the Walter F. George Reservoir south of Ft. Benning and many bridges and culverts in Lee, Russell and Barbour Counties, Alabama, for active Barn Swallow nests. Active nests were located: Alabama - five 2.1 miles north and ten 0.3 miles south of the Lee County Hwy. 81 intersection with Ala. Hwy. 169; 16 at the Ala. Hwy. 165 crossing of Hatchechubbee Creek, Russell County; 26 and 18 at the Barbour County Hwy. 97 crossing of the south- and mid-forks of Cowikee Creek, respectively; 13 at the U.S. Hwy. 431 crossing of Cheneyhatchee Creek, Barbour County; 8 at the Ala. Hwy. 95 crossing of White Oak Creek, Barbour and Henry Counties; 2 at the Old River Road crossing of Harbridge Creek, Henry County; Georgia - 8 at the Florence Landing Marina, Stewart County; 27 at the Ga. Hwy. 39 crossing of Pataula Creek, Clay County. In Lee County, two colonies were located in culverts adjacent to lowland pastures. Near large open areas, concrete bridges spanning creeks were almost solely used for nesting at the Walter F. George Reservoir. Although several steel and wooden bridges were examined at similar sites in Stewart and Quitman Counties, no nests were found. During a nest-site selection study in east-central Mississippi, Jackson and Burchfield (1975) also found that Barn Swallows selected concrete over wooden and steel bridges.