

BREEDING STATUS OF THE SONG SPARROW, MELOSPIZA MELODIA, IN ALABAMA

C. W. Summerour

The Song Sparrow, Melospiza melodia, is a common winter resident throughout Alabama and a locally common summer resident in the northeastern corner of the State. In recent years the species appears to have been extending its range slowly into the mountain region and has become a common summer resident in certain localities.

The first record of a Song Sparrow in Alabama during the breeding season was an account given by T. Z. Atkeson of a bird at Wheeler Refuge on June 5, sometime between 1936 and 1946. About ten years later positive breeding evidence was confirmed by T. A. Imhof (1962) and H. M. Stevenson who observed a parent bird feeding a dependent fledgling at Valley Head in DeKalb County on June 4, 1954.

Since Imhof's and Stevenson's record, numerous singing males have been reported from the mountain region, notably from Jackson, Marshall, DeKalb, Cherokee, Morgan and Etowah counties, but no nesting observations were recorded to confirm positive breeding evidence.

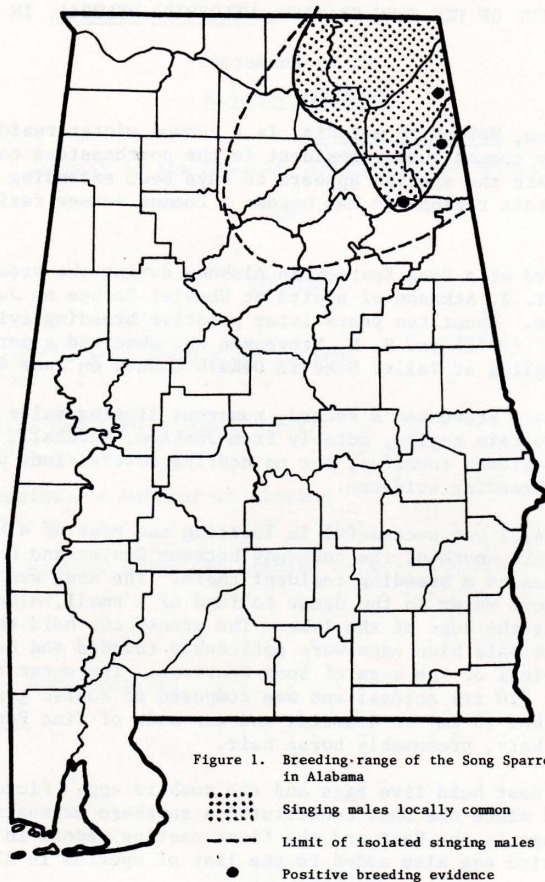
On May 21, 1974, I was successful in locating the nest of a Song Sparrow on an island in Weiss Lake south of the causeway between Center and Cedar Bluff, confirming the species as a breeding resident there. The nest was well concealed 30 inches (76 cm) above water in the dense foliage of a small, alder, Alnus serrulata, growing at the edge of the lake. The grassy cup held three eggs and one cowbird egg. The pale blue eggs were noticeably rounded and heavily marked with brown dots, typical of the eggs of Song Sparrows. The outer cup of the nest measured four inches (10 cm) across; and was composed of coarse grasses; the inner cup measured two inches (5 cm) in diameter and was made of fine Panicum tops and sparsely lined with hair, presumably horse hair.

On May 25 the nest held five eggs and the cowbird egg. Pictures were taken to verify the record since the nest constituted a southern extension of the Song Sparrow's summer range in the East and the first nesting record in Alabama. The presence of the cowbird egg also added to the list of species in Alabama parasitized by cowbirds.

Song Sparrows have been common in Piedmont in northern Calhoun County for at least the past three years, and in May, 1977, I observed a parent bird feeding a fledgling in a vacant lot there, providing further breeding evidence. The birds are also common in Gadsden and around Guntersville Lake and probably in localized areas within the shaded area shown in Figure 1.

Positive breeding evidence has now been recorded at Weiss Lake, Piedmont and Valley Head, but the birds probably nest wherever they occur during the summer months, with the possible exception of isolated males on the leading edge of the range extension.

Isolated singing males have been recorded at Anniston (C. W. Summerour, August 6, 1976), Birmingham (T. A. Imhof, June 6, 1971) and, as mentioned earlier, at Decatur (T. Z. Atkeson, June 5, between 1936 and 1946).



At present, the leading edge of the Song Sparrow's range extension in Alabama, based on observations of singing males, extends approximately from the Tennessee line in Madison or Limestone counties south to Decatur and Birmingham and east to Anniston and northwestwardly to the Georgia State line (Figure 1).

Song Sparrows prefer disturbed habitats in early seral stages of development. Good places to look and listen for them is around weedy, vacated lots, junk yards, parking lots, railroad rights-of-way, old fields, and along lake edges. There is an abundance of disturbed habitats in Alabama and it seems probable that the Song Sparrow will slowly continue to increase as a breeding resident in the State.



### Literature Cited

Imhof, T. A. 1962. Alabama Birds. State of Alabama Department of Conservation, Game and Fish Division. University of Alabama Press, University. 591 p.

Department of Biology  
Jacksonville State University  
Jacksonville, Alabama

### NEW COLONY OF CLIFF SWALLOWS AT CEDAR BLUFF

C. W. Summerour

For at least the past two years Cliff Swallows, Petrochelidon pyrrhonota, have been nesting in association with Barn Swallows under a bridge spanning Weiss Lake on highway 68 just west of Cedar Bluff, in Cherokee County.

Several Cliff Swallows were first observed flying among Barn Swallows near the bridge on the 1977 June Breeding Bird Census. A check under the bridge turned up three active nests. In June 1978 six nests were counted from the same vantage point and more Cliff Swallows were seen among the Barn Swallows. Other nests were probably under a portion of the bridge that could not be seen without a boat.

This new colony represents at least the second occurrence of positive breeding outside the Tennessee Valley since 1975, and the birds have been seen during June and July in Cullman, Walker and Jefferson counties as well (Imhof, 1976). Since Cliff Swallows occupy a niche similar to Barn Swallows and show a similar preference for water and bridges as nesting sites, it seems likely that they may be extending their range southward into the State as Barn Swallows have been doing in recent years. Be on the alert for them darting about among the Barn Swallows near bridges and overpasses.

### Literature Cited

Imhof, T. A. 1976. Alabama Birds, 2nd ed. State of Alabama Department of Conservation, University of Alabama Press.

Department of Biology  
Jacksonville State University  
Jacksonville, Alabama