

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE



ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

Journal of the Alabama Ornithological Society

Vol. 29

1982

Nos. 1,2

CONTENTS

An Unusual Trap of Two Diurnal Raptors	3
Yellow Rail Specimen	4
Pelicans at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge . .	5
House Finch Breeding in Auburn, Alabama	6
Auburn Christmas Bird Count	6
Sighting of the Curlew Sandpiper	8
Grasshopper Sparrows Breed in Lowndes County, Mississippi	9
Shorebirds at Lake Oktibbeha, Mississippi in the Fall of 1980	11

OFFICERS (1982)

President: C. Dwight Cooley, 104 Ranger Boulevard,
Madison, Alabama 35758

Treasurer: Martha S. Rogers, 2708 43rd Avenue East,
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35404

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor: Dr. D. Tom Rogers, 2708 43rd Avenue East,
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35404

Seasons Editor: Thomas A. Imhof, 1036 Pike Road,
Birmingham, Alabama 35218

Counts Editor: Robert R. Rein, Jr., 2616 Mountain
Brook Parkway, Birmingham, Alabama 35223

AN UNUSUAL TRAP RESPONSE OF TWO DIURNAL RAPTORS

Daniel J. Drennen

While banding raptors on a study area in the lower piedmont, about 3 km north of Auburn, Alabama, an unusual interspecific behavior occurred between a Red-tailed Hawk (Buteo jamaicensis) and an American Kestrel (Falco sparverius)

On 5 January 1980, at 1500 hours, I attempted to capture an adult Red-tailed Hawk with a bal-chatri trap baited with a white mouse. The weather was cloudy with a slight drizzle. I was located in a car 45 m from the roadside trap. The Red-tailed Hawk was perched on a telephone pole and was about 7 m above the trap. The hawk immediately became interested with the mouse's activity inside the bal-chatri and began to strike. Unexpectedly, an American Kestrel (male adult) flew from an adjacent tree and struck the Red-tailed Hawk, foiling its attempt to grasp the trap. A few minutes later the Kestrel began to strike the bal-chatri and was intercepted by the Red-tailed Hawk. Finally, the birds perched about 9 m from each other on a telephone wire that crossed the road. They were almost equidistant (15 m) from the trap. Each time the Red-tailed or Kestrel dove toward the bal-chatri, the action was blocked by the other bird. This "stalemate behavior" occurred five times and continued for 45 minutes. It finally ended when a passing truck scared the birds from the immediate area. The Red-tailed Hawk flew the furthest from the site (90 m), while the Kestrel landed about 25 m away. Two minutes after the truck passed, the Kestrel was captured. The Red-tailed remained perched, still interested in the activities around the bal-chatri.

I found this to be an isolated incident throughout my study of raptors on the area. Interspecific and intraspecific interactions between raptors were few

and they mainly involved "territorial" conflicts of some kind (Drennen 1982, unpublished M.S. Thesis, Auburn University).

Daniel J. Drennen
2408 Regent Lane
Birmingham, AL 35226

YELLOW RAIL SPECIMEN

Julian L. Dusi and Mark Brown

An adult female Yellow Rail, Coturnicops noveboracensis, was captured in Tates Cove of the Skyline Wildlife Management Area, Jackson County, Alabama by area personnel, 29 September 1981.

The rail was flushed while a food plot in the cove was being mowed by a bush hog. The bird flushed and the worker ran after it and caught it. Mark Brown was called to make the identification and he brought the bird to Auburn for a museum specimen.

The bird was in good physical condition at the time of its capture. It has a total length of 160 mm and a wing chord of 76 mm. It is now specimen A-335 in the Auburn University Vertebrate Museum.

It seems odd for a rare rail to be found quite far from marsh habitat and for a poor flier to appear in the roughly dissected coves of this management area rather than in a river bottom.

Wade Manning, Manager of Skyline Wildlife Management Area, told Brown that he sees Yellow Rails each year when he mows the food plots in Tates Cove and that

August and September would be a good time to visit the management area to see them.

Julian L. Dusi
Department of Zoology-Entomology
Auburn, University, AL 36849

Mark Brown
2013 Park Street SE
Decatur, AL 35601

PELICANS AT EUFAULA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Julian L. Dusi

Pelicans are not usually seen at the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge.

Ortego, Dusi, Brown and Combs, 1979, in "Birds of Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge", 1967-1979, The Oriole 44(4): 61-87, reported the Brown Pelican, Pelecanus occidentalis, in late March, 14 April, and 12 November, 1977, one individual each date. The White Pelican, Pelecanus erythrorhynchos, has been reported only once, when Sam Pate saw 160 on 28 April 1977.

During 1981, I first recorded White Pelicans on 17 July and observed two together on several occasions through 6 September. The birds were seen mostly on the Kennedy Unit swamps with aggregations of wading birds.

Julian L. Dusi
560 Sherwood Drive
Auburn, AL 36830

HOUSE FINCH BREEDING IN AUBURN, ALABAMA

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary D. Dusi

House Finches, Carpodacus mexicanus, have been present on our feeders in Auburn in the winters of 1980 and 1981. One pair did not leave in 1981 but remained in Auburn, coming to our sunflower seed feeders throughout the spring and the summer.

At mid-summer, two fledged young appeared at the feeders with the adults and begged for food. They have subsequently appeared at the feeders so that we have seen the adults and young together a number of times.

We were not able to locate the nest but feel that the young appearing with the adults is adequate to confirm a breeding record.

Julian L. and Rosemary D. Dusi
560 Sherwood Drive
Auburn, AL 36830

AUBURN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary D. Dusi

The Auburn Christmas Bird Count, 1981, was held on December 26, using the Auburn Post Office as the center of the area.

Weather was overcast with the clouds no more than 1,000 m most of the time. Temperature was about 44° F and wind was northerly 5-10 km/h.

One party of five walked about 2 km and drove 68 km. The count lasted 9 h, starting at 6:30 a.m. and ending at 6:00 p.m. The party was composed of: Julian L. Dusi (compiler), Rosemary D. Dusi, Gert Hoganboom, Lorne Malo, and Katrice Seemann.

Sixty species (6.7/hr) and 1145 individuals (127.2/hr) were counted, with no rare sightings.

Great Blue Heron-12, Mallard-1, Wood Duck-12, Lesser Scaup-1, Unidentified ducks-30, Turkey Vulture-20, Black Vulture-150, Red-tailed Hawk-2, Marsh Hawk-2, American Kestrel-2, Bobwhite-2, Killdeer-6, American Woodcock-1, Common Snipe-4, Rock Dove-14, Mourning Dove-42, Screech Owl-1, Belted Kingfisher-6, Common Flicker-12, Pileated Woodpecker-8, Red-bellied Woodpecker-7, Red-headed Woodpecker-8, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker-5, Downy Woodpecker-5, Eastern Phoebe-5, Blue Jay-24, Common Crow-26, Carolina Chickadee-8, Tufted Titmouse-4, Brown-headed Nuthatch-12, Brown Creeper-2, Carolina Wren-8, Mockingbird-5, Brown Thrasher-1, American Robin-104, Eastern Bluebird-5, Ruby-crowned Kinglet-3, Cedar Waxwing-18, Loggerhead Shrike-2, Starling-28, Yellow-rumped Warbler-33, Pine Warbler-6, Common Yellowthroat-3, House Sparrow-8, Eastern Meadowlark-2, Redwinged Blackbird-322, Common Grackle-15, Brown-headed Cowbird-15, Cardinal-11, Purple Finch-4, House Finch-1, American Goldfinch-8, Rufous-sided Towhee-10, Savannah Sparrow-6, Dark-eyed Junco-4, Chipping Sparrow-3, Field Sparrow-28, White-throated Sparrow-26, Fox Sparrow-1, Swamp Sparrow-11, and Song Sparrow-21.

The paucity of northern species which usually winter in the area as common species was very noteworthy.

Julian L. and Rosemary D. Dusi
Post Office Box 742
Auburn, AL 36830

SIGHTING OF THE CURLEW SANDPIPER

Owen Fang

On Saturday morning 16 August 1980 at approximately 10:00 a.m., overcast sky, temperature about 82° F, wind from South at about 10 knots, a Curlew Sandpiper (Calidris ferruginea) in almost complete breeding plumage was observed by Owen Fang, Curtis Kingsbery, Don Richardson and Fred Wicke. The bird was observed at one time for about ten minutes at a distance of 50 feet within several feet of a Dowitcher and several Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers. The curved bill and the deep red brown color on the head, breast and belly made the identification unmistakable. This one observation was made with 7X35 and 10X50 binoculars and 20X and 35X scopes. All observations were made on the Eastern entrance to Perdido Bay across from Alabama Point near the edge of a large rain or tidal pool on the sand beach of the Gulf of Mexico.

The bird was then flushed and the white rump and tail observed. The tail appeared fanned out at the time of take off, and appeared to me white and sparsely flecked starting near the rump and distributed throughout the tail. I did not observe any black terminal band, but one observer did. If anyone reading this report has access to skins and/or has a good description of the upper tail markings of this species in breeding plumage, a report would be appreciated by me as well as the other observers.

After the bird was observed a second time in another spot one observer saw it flying around and then take off in a Westerly direction going altitude as it flew away.

It appears that this is the first fall record for the Alabama Gulf Coast. A previous sighting was made by T. A. Imhof in March of 1949 and another

sighting was made on 28 April 1972 by J. R. Bailey and J. F. Harsh.

Owen E. Fang
4731 Hurow Drive
Pensacola, FL 32507

GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS BREED IN
LOWNDES COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

Douglas Branch McNair

Grasshopper Sparrows (Ammodramus savannarum) nested in Mississippi at Golden Triangle Airport, Lowndes County in 1980. There are few breeding season reports for Mississippi. Thirteen birds were recorded along Mississippi River levees on the Dundee BBS route on 18 June 1978. This count was comparable to previous counts on this route (WW). Three were recorded in northeastern Mississippi on the Tupelo BBS route on 21 June 1978 (DC). Four, at least three singing, were recorded on the Yazoo NWR in southwestern Mississippi on 12 May 1979 (MOS). These birds may have been tardy migrants. Bierley (1980) said the Grasshopper Sparrow was rare and local in areas of Tennessee adjacent to Mississippi. Imhof (1976) indicated a local but widespread distribution for Alabama, including records for counties contiguous to Mississippi. Thus, confirmation of breeding in Mississippi was expected. There are undoubtedly more breeding localities than have been recorded.

The Golden Triangle airfield is a single long oval runway, about 600 m long and 100 m wide. Bermuda grass (Cynodon dactylon) is the dominant plant. Soybean (Glycine max) rows surround the airfield for most of its area. Other important plants are johnson grass (Sorghum halepense), foxtail grass (Setaria geniculata), Euphorbia nutans, Desmanthus illinoensis, and Sida rhombifolia.

An early morning census on 12 August produced twenty-seven pairs of singing males. There are probably a few more for the northernmost portion of the airfield was inadequately censused. I found a family, two adults and three or four juveniles, also seen the previous day, and obtained additional breeding evidence. Another adult gave a distraction display and a rodent run as it flushed in front of me while I walked through bermuda grass between the runways. A nest search was unsuccessful. A different adult, with a caterpillar, attempted to approach an area, but gave a rodent run when disturbed by my close presence. Finally, another adult had a caterpillar and was anxious, flying back and forth between a presumed nesting area and cover in soybean fields.

Grasshopper Sparrows may be double-brooded (Smith, in Bent 1968). Data at this locality indicates nests may be active in August. Only the Eastern Meadowlark shares the same habitat for both nesting and feeding. Avian competition is probably minimal except for Brown-headed Cowbird (Molothrus ater) brood parasitism. Cowbirds are numerous at this locality during the nesting season. Elliott (1978) recorded very high rates of brood parasitism in a population of Grasshopper Sparrows in Kansas tallgrass prairie. Cowbirds usually cease depositing eggs in Mississippi by early July and sparrow success may be high for second broods. Study of the importance of this factor and others, e.g. habitat, climate, food supply, are unknown and thorough study is wanting on this species in the Southeastern states.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bierley, M. L. 1980. Bird Finding in Tennessee. Bierly, Nashville, Tennessee.
- Elliott, P. F. 1978. Cowbird parasitism in the Kansas tallgrass prairie. *Auk* 95:161-167.
- Imhof, T. A. 1976. Alabama Birds. 2nd ed. Alabama University Press, Birmingham.

Smith, R. L. 1968. In A. C. Bent. Life histories of North American cardinals, grosbeaks, buntings, towhees, finches, sparrows and allies. U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 237.

Douglas Branch McNair
College of Sciences
Department of Zoology
Clemson University
Clemson, SC 29631

SHOREBIRDS AT LAKE OKTIBBEHA, MISSISSIPPI
IN THE FALL OF 1980

Douglas Branch McNair

I visited Lake Oktibbeha, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, nineteen times from 22 August-7 November 1980 and recorded 20 species. Visits were usually spaced 3-4 days apart, in accord with International Shorebird Survey guidelines and constraints on my time. Counts were exact; "peep" numbers were rounded off on several dates because of their feeding movements. Birds were aged/sexed where possible or convenient.

Lake Oktibbeha is public and is easily accessible. The dam burst during the winter of 1979-1980, followed by a summer drought. By August of 1980 more than half the lake had drained. Flats one-half mile long by 100-200 feet wide existed on the west and north sides and almost all shorebirds were recorded here. Disturbance was light to moderate, usually by fishermen. Normally, when the lake is full, powerboats are the most common cause of disturbance, but shallow water prohibited water skiing. There are few prior records of migrating shorebirds at this site, perhaps because normal water levels preclude stopover. Migration during the fall of 1980 indicates that shorebirds may be numerous. Stopover appears to be opportunistic, but this is speculating without weight, molt, and banding/markings data. Almost all species were observed feeding;

few rested though several isolated areas were available. Data are biased toward high numbers because visits were timed to follow northerly fronts as much as possible. Peaks of passage were early September with a smaller peak in mid-October. The last two dates had biased results because flats were covered by the effects of recent heavy rains and coverage was discontinued.

Species list and abbreviated remarks follow:

Semipalmated Plover	11 dates: 22 August - 27 September; maximum of 9 on 7 September.
Killdeer	18 dates: 22 August - 7 November; maximum of 20 on 22 August.
Lesser Golden Plover	1 adult in molt on 15 September. Some gold spangling left on mantle and half of black on belly gone. Tame and feeding.
Black-bellied Plover	1 adult in molt on 29 August. Retained most breeding plumage. Bird called and circled lake, eventually flying out.
Common Snipe	8 dates: 11 September - 22 October; maximum of 27 on 11 October.
Spotted Sandpiper	16 dates: 22 August - 22 October; maximum of 4 on 7 September.
Greater Yellowlegs	3 dates: 17 September - 29 October; maximum of 5 on 17 September.
Lesser Yellowlegs	8 dates: 22 August - 22 October; maximum of 10 on 17 September;
Red Knot	Flock of 6 adults on 29 August; one had almost completed molt into winter plumage. This bird separated from flock and was also seen on 3, 7 September. It rested as well as fed. Second inland MS record.

Pectoral Sandpiper	12 dates: 22 August - 11 October; maximum of 8 on 23 September.
Least Sandpiper	18 dates: 22 August - 29 October; maximum of 80 on 22 October. However, major passage occurred the second week of September.
Dunlin	6 on 22 October.
Short-billed Dowitcher	9 dates: 22 August - 19 September; maximum of 7 adults on 25 August.
Long-billed Dowitcher	5 on 11 October. Fed with Stilt Sandpipers.
Stilt Sandpiper	8 dates: 22 August - 11 October; maximum of 4.
Semipalmated Sandpiper	3 dates: 22-29 August; maximum of 10.
Western Sandpiper	12 dates: 22 August - 11 October; maximum of 40 on 3 September. There are few previous inland records for MS and prior inland maximum was 11 on 25 October 1977 at Greenville (GEA).
"peep", spp.	17 dates: 22 August - 22 October; maximum of 60 on 3 September. Most were probably Western Sandpipers.
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	4 juveniles on 15 September and 1 on 30 September, the latter flying over and calling. The former were feeding on baked lake beds, picking and probing on the surface and cake crevices and above ground on grasses, sedges, and <u>Polygonum</u> .
Sanderling	7 adults in flock in 3 September; 3 adults in flock on 17 September.

Northern Phalarope

1 on 7 September. Unsure of age or sex. Feeding near shore with other shorebirds. Called several times. Sixth MS record.

Douglas Branch McNair
College of Sciences
Department of Zoology
Clemson University
Clemson, SC 29631

The Walter F. Coxe Research Fund of the Birmingham Audubon Society, honoring a much-loved, and still active, founding member of the Society, provides small grants to persons conducting scientific research, in any area of endeavor, which has clear applicability to environmental issues, particularly as they affect Alabama. The projects themselves need not necessarily be carried out in Alabama, however. The grants so far have been less than \$500 each, and are intended as "seed" money to initiate projects. We are especially interested in hearing from graduate students, or others outside the mainstream of normal funding. A full description of the Fund, including details of the application, is available from Chairman, Walter F. Coxe Research Fund, Birmingham Audubon Society, P. O. Box 314, Birmingham, Alabama 35294.

