

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

1 November 1955.

Dear Fellow-Members:

When you honored me last spring by electing me to the presidency of our society, I little thought my duties with the Air Force would take me away from Alabama as much as they have the past 5 months, and I certainly did not expect to be out of the country most of the ensuing year.

As many of you already know, I am leaving tomorrow for Panama, where I board the Navy's new icebreaker, USS Glacier, as she goes through the Canal, and sails to New Zealand, and thence to the Ross Ice Shelf in Antarctica. We expect to reach our destination early in December, and will stay there through the antarctic summer (temperatures range from 10° below zero, F., to a maximum of 37° above), and leave about March first, returning home late in April or early in May.

My official duties are to be Air Force Observer on the Navy's "Operation Deep Freeze," but I expect to have time to play with the penguins as well. I will be collecting zoological specimens of all sorts for the U. S. National Museum, and I am taking about 5,000 bird bands of various sizes with me, as well as the flipper tags used on seals in the Pribilofs, which I hope to use on the Emperor Penguins. These birds have no tarsus whatever, and the only way to mark them for future identification is with a tag on the flipper. How successful we will be remains to be seen, but as the bases we are establishing will be occupied at least until the end of the International Geophysical Year in 1957-58, marking penguins at this time should provide the groundwork for later observations on their movements.

While this one of the most interesting assignments the Air Force has given me, I realize that it will in no way help to further the conservation of bird life in Alabama nor will it contribute to the other aims of the A.O.S. I am sincerely sorry that it will prevent me from fulfilling my obligations as your president, but not even for the A.O.S. would I give up the opportunity to be a part of one of Admiral Byrd's expeditions to Little America.

I know that in my absence our able vice president will conduct the affairs of the organization and hold the spring meeting without waiting on my return. If I am here then, I will tell you about the really "deep south" where I have been, and if my return is delayed I will hope for the privilege of speaking to you at the fall meeting.

I shall write from New Zealand before we head southward for an incommunicado 4 months, and tell you of our trip across the South Pacific.

Sincerely yours,
O. L. AUSTIN, JR.

POST-BREEDING ACTIVITIES OF THE ALABAMA TOWHEE

By MAY S. LAUDEN

The Alabama Towhee, *Pipilo erythrophthalmus canaster* Howell, a subspecies of the Eastern Towhee, *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* (Linnaeus), was observed by the writer at Auburn, Alabama, during the period from October, 1952 through June, 1953. During this time the territories of ten breeding pairs were located, determined, and studied in detail. The information obtained during this study was published in the Alabama Bird-Life during 1954.

An additional study was undertaken to determine if these breeding pairs still remained on their spring nesting territories during the autumn of 1953. A review of the literature revealed controversial evidence with regard to migration of the Alabama Towhee. Dickinson (1952) commented that the retention of Howell's original concept of the sedentary nature of the Alabama Towhee is impracticable. He agreed that a portion of the towhee population remained on the breeding grounds during the winter but that specimens taken in the winter indicated some post-breeding movement. This was supported by Burleigh (1944) who was convinced, that in part of its range, the Alabama Towhee is migratory. Williams (1945 and 1950) reported that towhees do not migrate south of the United States.

The area in which the study was made contained the ten territories identified and studied during the spring of 1953, which area was limited to that land lying within a one-half mile radius of Comer Hall of the Alabama Polytechnic Institute. Trapping operations were also conducted in the areas adjacent to these territories. Since the Red-eyed Towhee migrates from the north and winters in this locality, the towhee population during the fall of the year far exceeds that found in the area during spring and summer. By retrapping each territory and by observing adjacent areas, I attempted to learn whether or not the sedentary nature of the Alabama Towhee was such that this bird remained on its breeding grounds during autumn and also if it maintained winter territories.

This article is a portion of a paper submitted to Dr. Henry G. Good, Professor of Zoology-Entomology, A.P.I., to whom I am indebted for his guidance in this work. I am deeply grateful to

Colonel Francis E. Rogan for a critical reading of the manuscript and to Dr. Julian L. Dusi for his untiring assistance and interest in this project.

POST-BREEDING PAIRS. The data of the Alabama Towhee families banded during the spring of 1953, while on their breeding territories, and the members of these families subsequently trapped during the autumn of 1953 in these same areas is discussed as follows: of the 28 members of the 10 Alabama Towhee families, there were nine male and five female parents, and 14 nestlings banded during the spring months of 1953. Since traps were removed immediately when the male was trapped, during the time the female was busy with her nesting activities, this accounts for the lower percentage of female parents banded. Although two male and two female parents were retrapped on their spring nesting territories, none of the nestlings, now immatures, were recaptured during the autumn of 1953. These captured parents were one each of four pairs, representing four different territories.

In Territory No. 1, two towhees which had been banded during the early part of 1953 by the writer, were retrapped during the following autumn. One of these was the female parent of this territory, and the other a male which was banded immediately outside the eastern boundary of the area.

The female parent of Territory No. 4, banded April 17th was retrapped at the identical trap location on November 25th.

The male parent of the towhee family of Territory No. 9 was retrapped October 30th. This male (512-07224), banded May 27th, was captured at the same time as the female who now carries No. 512-07260. This female had not been banded during the breeding season. Subsequent observations indicate that this pair were constant foraging companions.

Trapping in Territory No. 10 produced the male of the spring breeding pair on October 21st. The incubating female was not banded during her nesting activities. Repeated observations of this newly feather-marked male and the female (512-07245) trapped in another cell of the same trap at this time indicates a fixed home range for this pair.

After six days of unsuccessful trapping operations, the loss of a trap in Territory No. 2, and the inaccessibility due to the filling-in work performed at the bottom of the slope in Territory No. 3 terminated the trapping in these areas.

Territories Nos. 6 and 7 are the two areas without a thicket or vine-covered coppice. During the 20 trapping days on these territories, a number of the winter resident towhees were trapped and banded but none of the parents of the breeding pairs were captured.

While Territories No. 5 and No. 8, as well as the adjacent areas, were heavily trapped because banded towhees had been observed while foraging, the only successful captives were the winter visitant towhees.

Of the 10 nesting pairs of Alabama Towhees, 90 percent of the males and 50 percent of the females were among those banded during the spring of the year. While less than 30 percent of these spring-banded adult towhees were retrapped on their territories during the autumn of 1953, there are certain facts which must be considered. The banding of the female parents was considered of less value, when studying the size of the territories, as the foraging of the males extended to a greater distance from the nest-site than did that of the female parents. Consequently, when the male of the nesting pair was trapped and banded, traps were removed in order that the incubating and brooding female would not be kept from her nesting activities.

The feather-marking of birds in the spring was no longer effective in autumn when this portion of the study was made, and the colored-enamel bands, also used for identification of individuals, had worn off so that it necessitated the use of a hand lens to learn the color of the enameled bands when towhees were trapped. A new band of the same color was then substituted for the original worn-off enamel band. While a number of banded birds on the various territories were observed, the actual trapping was essential for definite identification. All banded towhees were not retrapped, and records of these could not be included in the final percentage of "retraps."

A factor which is worth consideration is that all of the territories which produced one retrapped parent contained a thicket which was used for roosting during the nesting season, and also had dense foliage which afforded the necessary cover during the autumn season. While predators were not included in this study, a Screech Owl and a Sharp-shinned Hawk, as well as a number of opossums, squirrels, norway rats, and cotton rats were captured in the bird traps. Not discounting the depredations of the snakes and the domestic cats in this locality, the high mortality of our song birds is well known. Considering all of the above mentioned factors, the retrapping of these (almost 30 percent) parent Alabama Towhees on their nesting territories in autumn, 1953, is significant evidence that our resident towhees have relatively fixed home ranges.

FORAGING AREAS: Scratching in the leaves and humus is the characteristic hallmark of the Alabama Towhee during autumn and winter. Since immature males and females have been repeatedly seen foraging in pairs during the summer and

fall, the pairing of towhees is probably indicative of their nature as they certainly are not a solitary bird. At no time during the fall season were the various songs of the towhee heard. With the male no longer singing in autumn, he does not advertise his whereabouts nor does he indicate to the other males of his species that he is occupying an area. During the time the male and female forage together, the typical towhee call may be heard, sometimes as an alarm note and other times as a recognition note to its mate. Both the female and male utter the call on occasion throughout the year. As previously reported (Lauden, 1954), small flocks were observed foraging, and pursuit-flying and fighting by bodily contact occurred during the fall of the year. The reason for these antics seemed that the male of the pair was definitely concerned about his mate and would not concede to the interference of another male accompanying them too closely on their foraging expeditions.

In the entire trapping operations during the fall season, as many as 20 towhees (10 males and 10 females) were captured on one of the ten territories. During the breeding season, another towhee was seldom observed within the boundaries of any of the territories studied. Winter territories are not established by these towhees.

Summary and Conclusions

The Alabama Towhee is a year-round resident in the vicinity of Auburn, Alabama. Of the 10 breeding pairs of Alabama Towhees, 14 were banded during the nesting season in spring, 1953. Four of these birds were retrapped on their spring-nesting territories during the autumn of 1953. The captured birds, two males and two females, were one each of four breeding pairs, representing four different territories. Of the 14 nestlings banded during the spring months, none were recaptured on the territories nor in any of the adjacent areas in which trapping was conducted. The recapturing of almost 30 percent of parent Alabama Towhees on their own territories in autumn, 1953, indicates that our resident towhees have relatively fixed home ranges.

Towhees are usually seen foraging in pairs, but small flocks may be observed feeding in relatively small areas. Although towhees are not a pugnacious species, fighting by bodily contact and pursuit-flying were observed during the autumn months. Life-pairing was concluded to be the reason for these skirmishes. Trapping records during the autumn season revealed that as many as 20 towhees were captured on one of the ten spring-nesting territories. Although winter territories are not established by the Alabama Towhees, they do forage in pairs and their call may be heard throughout the year.

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AN ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS OBSERVED ON THE GULF COAST

By JULIAN L. DUSI and ROSEMARY T. DUSI

A visit to the Gulf Coast of Alabama, from September 6 through September 20, 1955, permitted us to make a number of interesting ornithological observations.

The weather was typical of summer, mostly clear and hot. It rained on September 12 over most of the area with a heavy downpour at Fairhope.

Two definite migrations were noted on the Bon Secour area. The first was on September 12 and 13, after the heavy rain at Fairhope. The second was on September 20.

We stayed at a court across from the post office at Gulf Shores. This was a good central location for studying several different ecological situations.

The beach and lagoon area at Gulf Shores is an excellent situation for studying many water birds and those associated with marshes. By following highway 182 west until the pavement ended and then continuing on the unimproved road until its end, a stretch of seven or eight miles of beach is available on one side and the marshy shore of the bay on the other. We visited this area almost every day.

By following the canal road east from Gulf Shores, the Orange Beach and Bear Point areas may be visited. Much of the habitat along this road is fairly open pine and grass lands. Red Cockaded Woodpeckers are found here. There are also a few swampy places where deciduous trees are thick and tangled