

THE AVERY BIRD COLLECTION

DAN C. HOLLIMAN

There is presently deposited in the University of Alabama Department of Biology Collections a valuable and well-preserved series of birds. This assemblage consists mainly of Alabama birds which were collected by the late Dr. W. C. Avery of Greensboro, Alabama.

Dr. William Cushman Avery, son of Rev. John Avery, D.D., was born in Edenton, North Carolina, on September 21, 1831. He graduated from Burlington College, New Jersey, in 1852, and then went to the University of Pennsylvania to study medicine. After studying at the University of Pennsylvania he decided to go to Paris to complete his medical curriculum. While overseas he visited Italy, Germany, Spain and Switzerland and traveled on foot in these countries studying the natural history there. Upon completion of his education in Europe he returned to the United States and settled down in Marshall, Texas, where he practiced medicine. After a few years in Texas he returned to Alabama and remained in Selma until the outbreak of the Civil War. He patriotically enlisted in the Confederacy as a private but never knew the rigors of war, for he contracted measles and typhoid fever soon after reaching Virginia. Because of this complicated illness he was retired from the service and returned home to Greensboro, Alabama, where he spent the remainder of his life practicing medicine and studying ornithology.

It is interesting to consider the scope of his ornithological work and reflect upon the problems that confronted him. Upon examination of his field records it is obvious that he was restricted almost entirely to Greensboro, Alabama, and the surrounding territory. His only method of transportation was either by foot or by horse and carriage; and undoubtedly he did much birding while on a professional call. His field notes indicate that he made several trips to Anniston, Alabama, and at least one trip to Dauphin Island in Mobile County and Perdido Bay in Baldwin County. Dr. Avery swapped several skins with friends in New York, North Carolina and Arizona, but beside these out-of-state specimens the entire collection consists entirely of Alabama birds. It is also interesting to note that it wasn't until his 40th birthday that he became interested in collecting birds. The first entry in his catalogue was dated June 21, 1875 and his last entry was dated March 5, 1894. During this period of nineteen years he made a collection of 900 birds, prepared scientific skins of these birds, and compiled a set of very copious field notes. Dr. Avery used a .44 caliber revolver loaded with number 12 shot for most of his collecting. Dr. Avery was not only interested in birds but in small mammals such as rodents and spotted skunks, and made a series of collections of these mammals which are included with his bird collection.

The Avery Bird Collection consists mainly of land birds, and in comparison, is conspicuously short of shore and marine birds. Obviously, this was due to the fact that Dr. Avery did not have access to these types of habitats in Greensboro. However, he collected excellent series of the flycatchers, woodpeckers, thrushes, warblers and sparrows.

The Avery Bird Collection was purchased by the Geological Survey of Alabama and is now in the University of Alabama Department of Biology Collections. This collection is being used for taxonomic and ecological work concerned with the avifauna of Alabama.

LITERATURE CITED

Holt, Ernest G., 1921, Annotated List of the Avery Bird Collection. Museum Paper No. 4, Alabama Museum of Natural History, University, Alabama. Alabama Museum of Natural History, University, Alabama.

BALD EAGLE AT GULF SHORES

On March 18, 1960, while staying in Cabin No. 16, on the east shore of the lake at Gulf Shores State Park, an adult Bald Eagle was seen flying over the lake. The eagle came into the lake shore with legs down about one fourth mile from the cabin. It reappeared shortly, and flew to the east end of the lake and over the swamp a short distance to a tall pine tree in which a bulky nest was readily visible at about ½ mile distance. With 7x50 binoculars the bird could be seen at the nest, but no young could be seen. The eagle was seen once again that day when it perched for some time in a tree near where it was first seen. Time and facilities did not permit a closer examination of the nest.

One could locate this nest quite readily by following these directions: stand in front of the cabin (No. 16), facing directly away from it. From this position, look at an angle of about 45 degrees to the left. The nest is easily visible in one of the several tall pine trees about ½ mile away.

—MAURICE F. BAKER, Wildlife Research Unit, Auburn, Ala.

REGIONAL WINGBEATS

DECATUR—The record cold and snows of February and March changed abruptly into spring with the beginning of April. The shorebird flight seemed normal. On March 27, Margaret and Jim Robinson spotted a lone Marbled Godwit on mudflats northeast of the Decatur Boat Harbor, the second Godwit record for Wheeler Refuge.

Bill Depreast checked the nesting colony of Yellow-crowned Night Herons, located on Wheeler Refuge near the Triana community, and found them present on April 8, the earliest local record by several days. A recheck on May 20 showed at least five active nests with at least 12 young present.

David Hulse checked the Beulah Bay colony on May 3 and found nine Snowy Egrets and some 30 pairs of Little Blue Herons present, with birds of both species incubating. However, this was a decline compared with 1959 use, and no Black-crowned Night Herons used the colony this year.

Demett Smith, of Huntsville, prowling the northern part of the Refuge on weekends, came up with a number of interesting small-bird notes that filled several gaps in the Wheeler records. Among these were a Blackburnian Warbler on May 7, the second spring and only May record; A Canada Warbler on May 7, the only Refuge spring record; a Cape May Warbler on May 7, the second spring record; a Tennessee Warbler on May 15, the second spring record, and a Wilson's Warbler on May 15, the second Refuge record and the only spring record.

Twenty-six geese, no doubt cripples, remained on the Refuge throughout the summer, though there was no sign of nesting. Among these was a big gray goose, evidently a barnyard fowl, that had been noted keeping company and flying with Canada Geese here for the past two years.

Although no Trichomoniasis, the messy dove sickness, was noted or reported among local doves this spring or summer, dove numbers here are not high. No significant changes were noted in the behavior or numbers of other birds.

—THOMAS Z. ATKESON, P. O. Box 1643, Decatur, Alabama

HUNTSVILLE—We don't know whether the late cold weather kept the spring migrants south of Huntsville for a week or so, or whether we just missed seeing them on our field trips. The only first arrivals to beat our past records were one Black and White Warbler and one Chimney Swift on March 30, Routh-winged Swallows on April 3, and 2 Nighthawks on April 7.

We had what we thought to be our latest record for a White-crowned Sparrow on May 9, but found another on May 14, at Maysville, Alabama, about 13 miles northeast of Huntsville.

February 22 seemed to be a good day for the hawks heading north. We saw 10 Red-tailed Hawks, 6 Sparrow Hawks, 5 Marsh Hawks, and 1 Sharp-skinned Hawk between Huntsville and Decatur. The trip usually yielded only 2 red-tails and 1 Marsh Hawk.

At the spring meeting, Tom Imhof told us to be on the lookout for a Cerulean Warbler's nest at Monte Sano. He said that a nest had never been reported from Alabama. We looked all spring and found it quite frustrating to see and hear the birds all around us, yet not be able to find a nest. On June 18, right off Bankhead Parkway leading to Monte Sano Park, we heard some young birds making the usual noises they make while being fed. After a long search we located the nest about 50 feet off the ground in an elm tree. It was not long before a female Cerulean Warbler returned to the nest. While we watched, both the male and the female came to feed the young birds. Perhaps one thing which makes finding the nests of these birds so difficult is the fact that neither parent bird ever called or sang while in the vicinity of the nest. Collecting the nest will be quite difficult, but we plan to get it.

Our very casual observations for the past 4 years have failed to turn up any Whip-poor-wills in Madison County during the breeding season. On the one organized Whip-poor-will hunt conducted in the area on June 19, 1960, the authors and Mr. Demett Smith left Huntsville and traveled east on Highway 72, stopping occasionally to listen. This procedure was carried out to a point about 3 miles east of Gurley, where the road turned north on a country road into Jackson County. Approximately 5 miles north, as the moon rose about 11:30 p.m., the only Whip-poor-will of the evening was heard. This northern route was pursued through Jackson County into Tennessee, where we turned east. At Elora, Tenn., the route turned southward into Madison County where most of the northeastern portion of the county was covered. This trip covered about 130 miles and took over 4 hours, with frequent stops along the way.

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Although many Chuck-will's-widows were heard, only the one Whip-poor-will was heard, and it was in Jackson County. This somewhat scanty evidence seems to bear out the northwestern limit of the breeding range of the Whip-poor-will in Alabama as given by Howell's "Birds of Alabama", published in 1928.

We have moved from town to a 5-acre, mostly wooded lot 8 miles east of Huntsville. Finally, we have more in our yard than mockingbirds, starlings and English Sparrows. So far we have seen or heard 40 species right around the house since July 1. This does not include 18 of the most common species of this area. We have put out feeders, have made a shallow pond and have set our nets and traps. We anticipate doing much banding this fall and winter, and we hope to be able to make many worthwhile contributions to this journal.

—JIM AND MARGARET ROBINSON, R.F.D., Brownsboro, Alabama

(Ed. note—Not only do we look forward to hearing more from the Robinsons, but thank them for past service, both as treasurer and local managers for the spring A.O.S. meeting.)

BIRMINGHAM—Although the migrants arrived on the Gulf Coast on time, the continued cold of March caused migration to be later this year. March temperatures were 9.6 degrees below normal with freezes occurring on seventeen mornings. March 23rd marked the date of the last freeze of the winter. With April's warm days (mean 64.3 degrees) migration progressed on schedule.

Since spring Tom Imhof has continued to see a pair of Woodcocks near Robert's Field and the writer observed one June 5th near Camp Horner on the Cahaba River. This indicates that in spite of this Birmingham area being 11 inches below normal rainfall for the year (as of August 9) the Woodcocks have found necessary food to remain.

The last date of a White-throated Sparrow for spring was May 19th at Mrs. Frank Wingate's. The misplaced White-throated Sparrow that has spent two summers ('58 and '59 near the Kenneth Grimley's house has not been seen since June 19th when they left on vacation.

The Finch family's propensity to albinism was observed at the Frank Wingate's where on May 18th a male English Sparrow was observed feeding two completely albino young.

Bo Sullivan, Jr., collected a White Ibis on the golf course of the Mountain Brook Country Club.

On July 31st the writer visited Lake Purdy which is usually low this time of year providing mud flats attractive to shore and water birds. There were 8 adult and 25 immature Little Blue Herons, 7 immature Yellow-crowned Night Herons, 3 Green Herons, 1 Great Blue, 8 Pectoral Sandpipers and 1 Spotted Sandpiper (still with spots). On August 9th the number of adult Little Blues had diminished, but 20 immature remained, along with 1 adult and 1 immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron, and two Pectoral Sandpipers. Again on August 13th at Purdy there was a flock of 24 immature Little Blue Herons, among them 1 Snowy Egret, 3 Green Herons, 1 immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron and 2 Spotted Sandpipers.

The week of August 8th the water works reservoir atop Shades Mountain provided an attendant American Egret standing sentinel between the two pools.

(He was still there on August 19.—Ed.)

—HARRIETT H. WRIGHT (MRS. D. O.), 2749 Millbrook Rd., Birmingham, Ala.

MONTGOMERY AND CONSERVATION DEPT.—A total of 1,368 birds were banded by personnel of the Department of Conservation during the first half of 1960. Of this number, 1,012 were Mourning Doves, 46 Wood Ducks, 6 Common Snipe, 4 Common Egrets, 84 Little Blue Herons, and 216 White Ibis.

A Little Blue Heron nesting colony was found one mile east of Mountain Creek, in Chilton County by the writer during June. The colony is small, with approximately 75 nests. Twenty-five Little Blue Heron nestlings were banded on this area. The White Ibis—Little Blue Heron nesting colony located 8 miles south of Opp, Covington County, was visited three times during June and 216 nestling White Ibis, 59 Little Blue Herons, and 4 Common Egrets were banded on this area. This area is ideal for banding nesting birds. All nests are located above water and the area is clean and cool with an abundance of small trees growing out of the water.

Sixteen Cattle Egrets were seen by the author on July 6, 1960, on County road No. 75, 4.3 miles south of Pansey, Houston County, Alabama. These birds were feeding in association with a herd of cattle. The buff-colored patch on the lower throat region was very conspicuous. It is quite possible that these birds were or had nested in the southern part of that county.

—JAMES E. KEELER, Dept. of Conservation, Montgomery, Alabama

GULF COAST—While on vacation in August some material for this report was gathered. Field trips were made along the coast, the upper delta, and the river swamps of Clark and Monroe Counties. Bird life was abundant in all areas, except for a few species. A check list of 93 species was obtained.

About 75 White Pelicans remained in this area until the last week of July, considerably later than usual. Coots also stayed later and one pair nested at Gulf Shores. The adults and 3 chicks were seen again this week. There have been reports for several years of nesting coots, but this is the first I have found.

Black Terns, adults and immatures, have been seen all summer. I feel certain they are nesting locally, although I have as yet no positive proof. Several years ago I found hundreds of young on Petit Bois Island that were too young to have migrated far. Perhaps next year we can find a nesting colony.

Not a Brown Pelican has been seen this year. Also, the Frigatebird has been missing, probably killed in large numbers by the same storm of last year which did so much damage to the pelicans.

Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites have been numerous, but Bald Eagles and Ospreys are hard to find this summer. Wild turkeys, Bob-Whites and Mourning Doves have had an excellent breeding season in this area. A pair of Ground Doves nested in my yard at Gulf Shores. Our dry spring was no doubt a helpful factor in what seems to have been a wonderful breeding year for bird life.

—M. WILSON GAILLARD, D.D.S., 1508 Merchants Nat. Bank Bldg., Mobile, Ala.

NESTING OF BALTIMORE ORIOLE AT LIVINGSTON

Arthur H. Howell in his book "Birds of Alabama" (1928) stated that the Baltimore Oriole bred sparingly in the northern half of the state. He quotes Dr. W. C. Avery to the effect that at Greensboro, Alabama, the bird bred prior to 1870 but by 1890 was not to be found except in autumn migration. Roger Tory Peterson in his book "A Field Guide to the Birds" intimates the bird (in breeding) is absent on the southeast coastal plain.

Livingston, the county seat of Sumter County, Alabama, is in the south half of Alabama and on the southern edge of the middle coastal plain or Alabama Black Belt.

It was not until 1958 that I became aware of the probability of the nesting of the Baltimore Oriole in Livingston. I had seen a pair of the birds through the first week of June and again the middle of August and thought I had heard them between those dates. When the leaves had fallen I began my search for the nest but did not find my first one until in February, 1960, in the center of the territory where I had seen and heard the birds most. To date I have found five nests in four different sections of town, some appearing to be four or five years old. Three have been in Pecan trees, one in a Durand Oak and one in a Chinkapin Oak. All of them are made almost entirely of light colored horse hair with some bits of wrapping twine woven in, and swung from the ends of small branches from fifteen to thirty feet up.

Two of the nests have been of this summer (1960). The last one that I found contained little birds just hatched. When the young were only a week old the mother disappeared, apparently the victim of some tragedy. The male bird however "carried on" alone and at the end of the second week the little birds successfully left the nest.

—JENKINS JACKSON, Livingston, Ala.

(Ed. note—A picture of one of these nests was submitted, but unfortunately the organization's funds would not permit its inclusion.)

THE SONG SPARROW BREEDING IN DEKALB COUNTY

Many of us recall the day in June, 1954, when a group of us from Blanche Dean's Nature Camp discovered a Song Sparrow at Valley Head carrying food. This was the first positive proof of the breeding of the Song Sparrow in Alabama. Next year a singing bird was discovered in Fort Payne, 12 miles down the valley. The following year a second singing bird was found in Fort Payne right at the south end of the railroad station in the center of town. All of these birds were located in dense weeds within a few feet of the main line Southern Railway tracks and Wills' Creek.

Since 1954 I have traveled U. S. Highway 11 up and down this valley at least once or twice each summer. I have stopped at many likely-looking places along the highway to listen for Song Sparrows but never heard any. This July 9 (1960) I stopped for a traffic light in Collinsville, 15 miles south of Fort Payne, and sure enough a Song Sparrow was singing to the east, right along Wills' Creek and close to the railroad tracks.

It appears that the Song Sparrow has worked its way as a breeder south along Wills' Valley to near the Etowah County line but only in the center of towns. Is the next step Attalla, 23 miles southeast?

THOMAS A. JEFFERSON