

Brown Pelicans

We also saw a flight of 20 Brown Pelicans on July 7 in the Gulf off Panama City Beach. This compares with approximately 30 reported by Dr. Dan C. Holliman and others on Dauphin Island the spring and summer of 1968 and is encouraging evidence of at least a limited return of this species to our coastal water.

Literature Cited:

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2616 Mountain Brook Parkway
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

OBSERVATIONS ON A BROWN THRASHER
DEHUSKING ACORNS ON THE GROUND

Dr. Gordon Gunter

Pough (1946, The Eastern Land Birds, Doubleday, Inc., Garden City, N.Y.) says that the Brown Thrasher eats acorns. Imhof (1962, Alabama Birds, University of Alabama Press) makes the same statement. These and other local references make no mention of the fact that this slender built bird dehusks the acorns before eating them. This process would seem to be virtually impossible even when one sees it being done. For that reason the following observations may be of some interest.

The Brown Thrasher is quite common in this area and feeds often among the leaves in my yard.

I was amazed one fall day to notice that this long-billed bird had placed small leathery acorns in little pits in the ground and was trying to peck them open. This ground was soft, silty sand among large oak trees and small pines and my observations were made from my bathroom window. Over and over again the Thrasher pecked at the small leathery acorns and never before was I so impressed with the intensity with which wild animals seek food. Over and over the bird pounded so heavily that one would think it jarred his brains. Possibly such was the case, because every once in a while the Thrasher stopped as if to rest and take a few breaths. Every once in a while also the acorn flew out of the little pit. It was retrieved and replaced. I should have counted the times the bird struck the acorn but the surprising performance bemused me. In any case I had the impression that ten or a dozen strikes were made before the acorn fell open and the internal part, tannic acid and all, was made available to the Thrasher, who swallowed it immediately. Then the bird left the scene. There were several pits in the ground and obviously this bird or others gathered acorns and ate them at this place. However, I rather suspect that they do not eat many in one day because the effort seems to be very great.

The acorn in question is from the water oak, Quercus nigra, and it was identified for me by Mr. Lionel Eleuterius. In the early fall in this part of the world the external texture of this acorn is rather leathery.

Some authors have reported that the Brown Thrasher places acorns in cracks of wood and bark of trees. This may well be the ordinary case, but acorns placed in pits in the ground would seem to be safer to handle and less damaging if they are struck with a glancing blow.

After the above was written Dr. Oliver L. Austin has pointed out to me that M. P. Skinner (Guide to the winter birds of the North Carolina sandhills, 1928) "described exactly the same thing. . ." Apparently these observations have not been reported by other writers and mine stand as a corroboration of Skinner's.

Gulf Coast Research Laboratory
P. O. Box AG
Ocean Springs, Mississippi 39565