

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE



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NOTES ON THE DISCOVERY AND LOSS OF RED-COCKADED
WOODPECKERS IN TUSCALOOA COUNTY, ALABAMA

Jerome A. Jackson and Bette J. Schardien Jackson

Stevenson (1939:64) reported Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (Picoides borealis) as widely distributed in Walker and Tuscaloosa counties in west-central Alabama, including a nesting record at Jasper, Walker County. More recently, the species has been reported only in southern Tuscaloosa County on the 1967 Christmas Bird Count (Rogers 1968). Between 30 December 1977 and 6 February 1978, we spent six days searching in Tuscaloosa, Fayette, and Walker counties for evidence of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in the area. On 30 December 1977 we drove major roads within the area between Tuscaloosa and Carbon Hill. On this initial visit we discovered a Red-cockaded Woodpecker colony at the boundary of sections 13 and 14 in Township 18 S, Range 10 W, in Tuscaloosa County, southwest of Windham Springs. The location seems to be slightly west of the site indicated in Tuscaloosa County on Map 7 of Stevenson (1939:62). A thorough search of the area revealed six cavity trees and two Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Although there were Virginia (Pinus virginiana), loblolly (P. taeda), and longleaf (P. palustris) pines in the area, only the loblolly pines were old enough or large enough for cavity excavation by this species and all cavity trees were loblolly pines.

On 10 January 1978 we made a low altitude (100-250 m above ground) aerial survey of forested lands north of Tuscaloosa in Tuscaloosa, Fayette, and Walker counties. We observed no habitat that really looked optimal for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, but did locate one cavity tree on a cliff along Blue Creek in the northeast quarter of section 22, Range 9 W, Township 18 S, southeast of Windham Springs, Tuscaloosa, County. Van Waggoner located that cavity tree from the ground on 10 March 1978 and found it to be a Virginia pine with 2 abandoned enlarged Red-cockaded Woodpecker cavities. Other areas of potential Red-cockaded Woodpecker habitat that were located from the air were systematically searched by walking transects at

about 100 m intervals on 15 and 29 January and 12 and 16 February 1978. We found no other sign of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in any of the three counties.

On 26 February 1983 we again visited the site of the active Red-cockaded Woodpecker colony southwest of Windham Springs. A large clearcut area then stood in the place of the mature forest that had included the active cavity trees. We spent three hours carefully searching for evidence of the birds or new cavity trees in adjacent forest areas, but found neither. There is still suitable habitat nearby, particularly along the steeper slopes and ridges, but we can only hope that the Red-cockaded Woodpecker still persists in the area.

Based on our surveys, areas within the three-county region that have the highest potential of still supporting Red-cockaded Woodpecker colonies are: (1) ridges along Blue Creek in sections 22-26 of Township 18 S, Range 9 W; (2) big pine areas along the dividing ridge from Wolf Den Hollow to Bethel Church in Township 16 S, Range 9 W and Township 16 S, Range 8 W; (3) ridges and some creek bottom areas along Big Yellow Creek in sections 5-7 in Township 17 S, Range 8 W; and (4) big pine areas in sections 9, 10, and 15 in Township 17 S, Range 9 W.

Acknowledgments

Our work in Tuscaloosa, Fayette, and Walker counties was supported by a contract from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to Eco-Inventory Studies, Inc. Van Waggoner of the Bureau of Land Management provided extensive logistical support, accompanied us on early visits, and located the cavity tree along Blue Creek. Patricia Ramey Miller assisted us on the initial ground and aerial surveys.

Literature Cited

- Rogers, D., Jr. (compiler). 1968. 420. Tuscaloosa, Ala. Audubon Field notes 22:252-253.
Stevenson, H.W., Jr. 1939. Factors limiting the breeding

ranges of birds in Alabama. M. A. thesis, University of Alabama, University, Alabama.

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LATE PIEDMONT RECORD FOR THE PALM WARBLER

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary D. Dusi

On 9 June 1984, we recorded a singing male Palm Warbler, Dendroica palmarum, where Tallapoosa County Route 34 crosses the South Fork of Sandy Creek (Township 21 N; Range 23 E, Section 14) southwest of Dadeville, AL. The Palm Warbler was singing while the count was being made. After the 3-minutes of listening, we called up the male into the open, where we observed it from about 4 m distance for several minutes as it sang again.

Imhof 1976, in the second edition of Alabama Birds, gives May 10 as the latest Piedmont record. This observation extends the spring date to June 9.

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BIRDLIFE AT THE DAUPHIN ISLAND AIRPORT FROM 18 JULY TO 17 AUGUST 1983

Tommy King and John R. Porch

INTRODUCTION

The Dauphin Island Airport is well known as an important birding area for marsh and shore birds along the Alabama coast. To our knowledge no literature (with the exception of individual checklists) has been published discussing birdlife at the airport. The purpose of this

study was to determine which bird species utilized the airport marsh environs for feeding or loafing areas from mid to late summer 1983.

STUDY AREA

The Dauphin Island Airport is located on the north side of Dauphin Island, AL, 2.8 km west of the Causeway. The marsh covers approximately 50 hectares. During high tide most of this area is inundated with water from the Mississippi Sound. During low tide several mud flats are exposed on the north side of the airport. These mud flats and exposed marsh areas provide excellent feeding areas for many species of shore and marsh birds. Vegetation includes typical marsh plants such as: 2 cordgrasses (Spartina alterniflora and S. patens), black needlerush (Juncus roemerianus), salt grass (Distichlis spicata), marsh elder (Iva frutescens), sea myrtle (Baccharis halmifolia), and marsh pennywort (Hydrocotyle umbellata). The airport itself has limited use from light aircraft (primarily one aircraft).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Censuses were conducted on evenings when mud flats were exposed, providing feeding and loafing areas for the birds. All data were recorded between 1900 hrs and dark. Observations were performed by a minimum of 2 people positioned in different locations thereby encompassing a larger field of view. Visual and vocal observations of birds on the mud flats, in the marsh, or flying overhead were recorded with the aid of a spotting scope and binoculars. Weather conditions were also recorded for each observation period.

DISCUSSION

A total of 48 species was observed at the airport from 18 July through 17 August 1983 (Table 1 and Table 2). There was a slight increase in the number of species seen per day as the censusing progressed. The Red-winged Blackbird (Agelaius phoenicius) was the most abundant

species present followed by the Laughing Gull (Larus atricilla), Clapper Rail (Rallus longirostris), and Black Skimmer (Rhynchops niger).

Some species were not observed until the second week in August. The most notable of these were the Plovers, Sanderling (Calidris alba), and Spotted Sandpiper (Actitis macularia). The Black-bellied Plover (Pluvialis squatarola) was obviously an early migrant. The other individuals mentioned may also have been early migrants or were undergoing post-breeding dispersal.

Purple Martins (Progne subis) were observed regularly through 9 August but were not seen at the airport after that. During the second and third weeks of August large concentrations of Purple Martins were seen at the Isle Dauphin Country Club. The birds were probably congregating prior to their southward migration.

At the beginning of the study we suspected that there might be a correlation between the numbers and kind of birds seen and the weather. No such correlation was found.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank E. Slaughter for her assistance in this study, Dr. D. C. Holliman (Birmingham Southern College) for his guidance and reviewing this manuscript and Dr. J. L. Dusi (Auburn University) for also reviewing this manuscript.

Table 1. Numbers of species and individuals observed at the Dauphin Island Airport from 18 July through 17 August, 1983

	July							August								
	18	19	20	22	23	24	25	4	5	7	8	9	14	15	16	17
Brown Pelican																5
American Bittern							1	1								
Least Bittern				1	1			1					1			
Great Blue Heron									1		2			1		
Great Egret										1	2	2				1
Snowy Egret				6	5			2		3	1	2	1		1	1
Little Blue Heron		1					1							1		
Tricolored Heron						1	2	1				1	1		1	
Reddish Egret		1														
Green-backed Heron									1		1				2	1
Black-crowned Night Heron				1												
Yellow-crowned Night Heron								4	2		1	1		1	1	1
Clapper Rail	6	7	7	8	7	5	7	10	8	14	6	8	6	3	11	11
Black-bellied Plover												1	2		2	2
Wilson's Plover												2	1			
Semipalmated Plover												1	2	1	2	2
Piping Plover												1				1
American Oystercatcher	5			1	2	2	1			2					1	3
Greater Yellowlegs					9	9		2								
Willet		2	2	3	2	2	2	3				2		1		2
Spotted Sandpiper													3		2	
Sanderling												1	1			1
Semipalmated Sandpiper							11		3	3						
Pectoral Sandpiper																3
Short-billed Dowitcher										1						

Table 1. Continued.

	July							August								
	18	19	20	22	23	24	25	4	5	7	8	9	14	15	16	17
Laughing Gull			11	44	12	20	7	9	19	32	6	5	31	5	21	21
Herring Gull																2
Caspian Tern				2								8				
Royal Tern		1	3				3	15	25	5	3	5	12		5	11
Sandwich Tern												2				
Common Tern					3		1					5			5	
Forster's Tern												12				
Least Tern		3	4	5	2	5	4	4	7	4	7	2	3	2	2	3
Black Skimmer	11	13	14	7	7	5	4	8	2	5	5	8	3	1	5	6
Mourning Dove		1	21	9	8	3	2	1	10	1	2	2	1	1	2	1
Common Ground-Dove		3														
Common Nighthawk		3			1	2	1	8	3	1	4	4	4	1	9	1
Chimney Swift				3	3	6	3	3		2	3					
Belted Kingfisher										1		1				
Purple Martin	16	17	24	6	4	8	3	21	33	6	5	5				
Barn Swallow				5	5	12	6	11	21	3	3	10	5		5	50
Fish Crow				1	2	3	1	2	4	2	2	3	2	1	3	1
Northern Mockingbird					2							1		1	1	
European Starling												5	5			
Seaside Sparrow				2	1	1		2	2	2		2	2	1		2
Red-winged Blackbird	21	14	22	27	11	75	5	26	21	23	8	24	85	11	31	24
Common Grackle					3											
House Sparrow					3											
No. Species per Day	5	10	11	18	20	16	19	20	16	19	16	25	25	14	22	24

Table 2. Total No. Individuals per Day. Dauphin Island
Airport from 18 July through 17 August, 1983

July 18	59
July 19	60
July 20	114
July 22	134
July 23	90
July 24	159
July 25	65
August 4	134
August 5	162
August 7	111
August 8	59
August 9	99
August 14	200
August 15	31
August 16	115
August 17	154

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WHITE PHASE REDDISH EGRET (Egretta rufescens)
OBSERVED ON DAUPHIN ISLAND, AL.

Tommy King, Steven Foster, James C. Godwin

While on a birding trip to Dauphin Island's west end on 12 July 1984 at 1830 hrs, a dark phase Reddish Egret and a "white egret" were observed feeding side by side in a tidal pool on the north side of the island. After further observation it was determined that the "white egret" was indeed a white phase Reddish Egret. The late afternoon sky was overcast and we were able to approach within

approximately 45 meters of the 2 egrets. We observed the 2 egrets for approximately 20 minutes, allowing plenty of time for positive identification and several photographs to be taken. The 2 egrets were identical in height, morphology, and behavior. A few minutes before the white phase Reddish Egret was flushed 2 Snowy Egrets (Egretta thula) landed and began feeding in the same tidal pool, leaving no doubt as to the identification of the "white egret." According to Dr. J. L. Dusi and Dr. D. C. Holiman the only other white phase Reddish Egret that has been reported sighted on Dauphin Island was in the 1960's.

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THE USE OF SQUIRREL HAIR BY GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHERS

Tommy King

Near Lake Eufaula in the spring of 1984, gray squirrels enlarged the entrance holes of 2 Eastern Bluebird (Siala sialis) nest boxes to approximately 70 mm in diameter. In an attempt to stop any further destruction I began to reduce the local squirrel population, leaving the carcasses in the nearby woods for the scavengers. Before the front of the damaged boxes could be replaced, a pair of Tufted Titmice (Parus bicolor) nested in one of the boxes and fledged 4 young. I decided to wait and repair the boxes in the fall.

On 2 June 1984 I observed a Great Crested Flycatcher (Myiarchus crinitus) leaving the box in which the titmice had nested. I opened the box and found a nest with 4 eggs. Great Crested Flycatchers are known to often incorporate cast-off snake skins in their nests (Bent 1942 and Welty 1982). Instead of the characteristic snake skin these birds had incorporated a whole squirrel's tail into their nest. Apparently these birds plucked the tail from one of the dead squirrels for their nest adornment.

After the 4 young fledged I intended to collect the nest and squirrel's tail for Auburn University's Vertebrate Museum. When I opened the box, the nest was intact but the squirrel's tail was gone. Perhaps the flycatchers took it with them to a new nesting site.

Bent, A.C. 1942. Life histories of North American flycatchers, Larks, swallows, and their allies. Smithsonian Institution. United States National Museum Bulletin 179.

Welty, J.C. 1982. The Life of Birds. Saunders College Publishing. New York. Third Edition.

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WARBLERS ALIGHT ON A WAVE

Harriet Wright

This observation was made September 8, 1983 from the scheduled 3:30 p.m. Grand Manan Ferry that plies the twenty-five miles between Black's Harbour and Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick, Canada, in the Bay of Fundy. Grand Manan Island is due south of Black's Harbour. The sky was clear; a jacket was necessary. The sea was fairly calm with waves one to two feet.

The bird group was "WINGS" with Davis Finch the leader and eight participants. Standing on the top deck some forty feet above the water we were watching for sea birds. When about seven miles from the mainland our attention was drawn to two warblers flying low over the waves parallel to the boat and about forty feet out. The tiny birds alighted on a wave with wings and tail spread, rested for two or three seconds then arose and continued flying parallel to the ship's course. After about twenty seconds they again alighted on the water, rested briefly and arose, this time taking a northeast course toward the visible mainland.

Davis Finch identified the birds as Cape May Warblers, Dendroica tigrina, and remarked that once before he had observed this behavior from a Blackpoll Warbler, Dendroica striata, that alighted briefly on the water about four miles off Islamorada, Florida, about May 5, 1983. This was a very close observation; the bird seeming to come down carefully on the water surface, right beside the boat, rest for five or six seconds, then arise and continue towards the visible mainland.

I am grateful to Davis Finch for reading this manuscript and suggesting improvements.

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NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

Submit all material on typed double-spaced pages. Figures and tables should be numbered and labeled at the top of the figure or table in all capital letters. Common names of birds should be capitalized and should include the scientific name at the first use of the name, e.g. Red-tailed Hawk (Buteo jamaicensis).

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