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The Passenger Pigeon

TO ENCOURAGE STUDY OF WISCONSIN BIRDS

Bulletin of the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology

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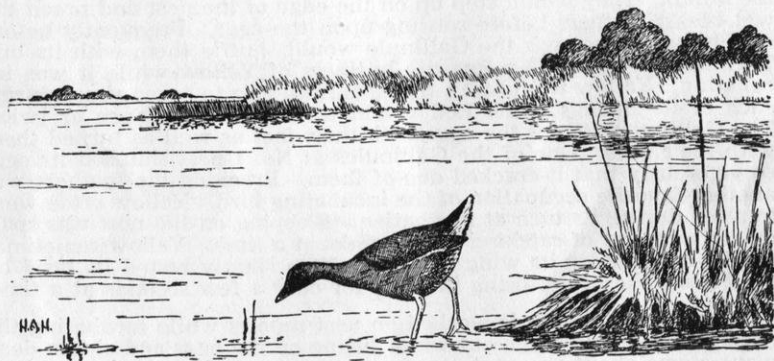
NOTES ON THE NESTING OF THE FLORIDA GALLINULE

BY MURL DEUSING

Milwaukee Public Museum

This study of the nesting habits of the Florida Gallinule (*Gallinula chloropus cackinnans*) was made by Peter Stieb, Carl Kinzel and the author during the summer of 1938 at Lake Koshkonong, Wisconsin. Twenty-six hours of observations were made on two nests from blinds.

The first Gallinule nests of the season were found on May 30th when three nests were located with 9, 8, and 4 eggs respectively. We continued to find Gallinule nests until July 8th. All of the nests were found over rather deep water (two or three feet deep). They were closer to the open water in the center of the marsh than either the



By J. Arthur Hochbaum, Courtesy Wisconsin Conservation Department

Coot, Virginia Rail, Sora, or American Bittern. Least Bittern nests were often associated with the Gallinule nests but the Least Bittern preferred heavy cover while the Gallinule frequently nested in very sparse vegetation and open situations. The nests were built on stalks of cattails or sedges with the bottom of the nest on the surface of the water and the rim four or five inches above. The nests were thick stout affairs woven with heavy stalks of cattails and sedges. Nests contained six to ten eggs which were a light olive brown color heavily marked with coarse irregular spots. This heavy spotting made the Gallinule's eggs easy to identify from the similar Coot eggs which were marked with finer spotting in a peppered effect. Heavy rains, which raised the level of the marsh 14 inches, did not damage the

Gallinule's nests though the majority of the associated Least Bitterns' nests were destroyed. The Gallinule nests floated on the rising water and the eggs were undamaged. On one of the nests we noted that the Gallinule layed an egg a day until the clutch was complete.

We were never able to identify the male from the female but we were able to distinguish between individuals coming to the nest. This we did by looking for identifying differences on the marking of the bill. For example, at nest No. 1 one of the pair had a yellow chipped area along the edge of the upper mandible while its mate had a perfectly smooth red edge to the bill. Since our blind was only eight feet away we were able to identify the birds coming to the nest as individuals. We found many individual differences in the pair at nest No. 1. The bird with the smooth bill was extremely shy and impossible to photograph. The slightest movement or noise in the blind would startle this bird and it would leave hurriedly. Its mate seldom became alarmed by the noise of the camera and a splendid series of pictures was obtained.

Nest No. 2 had a pair of very tame birds that seldom became alarmed. It was at nest No. 2 that a minute to minute record was kept of the actions of the incubating birds. We found that the birds alternated in incubating the eggs. One of the birds, which we called Yellow because of a yellow mark on her bill, averaged 55 minutes to a sitting and once sat and incubated for 78 minutes. The other of the pair, which we named Red, averaged 51 minutes to a sitting. The birds always approached the nest from the north (directly opposite the blind). They would step up on the edge of the nest and preen the wet breast feathers before settling upon the eggs. Frequently before settling upon the eggs the Gallinule would shuffle them with its bill. Turning the eggs was a favorite business of Yellow while it was incubating. Yellow would turn the eggs from five to seven times during each of its sittings while Red would turn them only once or twice. The Gallinules stirred the eggs with their feet as well as turned them with their bills. One of the Gallinules at No. 1 nest shuffled its eggs so vigorously that it cracked one of them. Preening the feathers was another favorite occupation of the incubating bird. Yellow often went to sleep during its turn at incubation. Sleeping on the nest was spasmodic, a matter of catching a few winks at a time. Yellow sometimes put its head under its wing but more often simply rested its head on the breast, the eyes closing in sleep for only a few seconds at a time.

Sometimes the birds worked on nest repairs while incubating the eggs. They would reach out while sitting on the eggs and obtain dead plant stems about the nest and insert them into the rim of the nest. Once Yellow brought nesting material to Red sitting on the nest and Red used it to build up the edge of the nest. During the times we were photographing and the nest was exposed to the direct sunlight the birds became quite restless in the heat and frequently rose from a sitting posture to pull at the surrounding vegetation in an attempt to make shade. Occasionally they managed to pull a sedge or cattail leaf over the nest.

Ordinary noises of the marsh did not disturb the Gallinules. Carp splashing nearby did not disturb the birds though the noise startled the observer in the blind. The Gallinules paid no attention to an aeroplane flying low over the marsh. If, however, another member of our party traveled over the marsh in a canoe or a skiff, even though he was 1,000 feet away, the Gallinule would immediately get off the nest, run out to the open water, look over the situation, and then re-

turn in a few moments to resume incubation. Gallinules were always aware of the presence of someone out on the marsh long before the observer in the blind.

The Gallinules had an interesting variety of harsh squealing notes that they used on and near the nest. The birds sometimes startled the observer with a loud staccato, "whup pup pup". The most common cries of the incubating bird were a coarse guttural "wha-a-a-a" or a "wha-a hap". This was frequently answered by a Gallinule out in the marsh with a "wh-he-he-he hep pep pep p-p-p", a startling resemblance in tone and timing to the call of the pied bill grebe. Yellow often called a short guttural "wha-a-a-a" toward the end of its turn of incubation.

It almost seemed as though the bird was becoming impatient and was trying to attract the attention of its mate out in the marsh. When changing places for incubation the sitting bird would leave the nest and the relieving bird would come to the nest from one to eight minutes later. The average interval between changes when the nest was unoccupied was five minutes.

We saw the first Gallinule eggs hatching on June 20th; the last clutch of eggs observed to hatch was on July 31st. We found the incubation period to be 20 to 22 days. The hatching young required 24 to 48 hours to work their way out of the egg shell.

A NEW LONDON (WISCONSIN) STARLING ROOST

BY REV. FRANCIS S. DAYTON

New London Public Museum

For some years back, Martins, Robins, Mourning Doves and Starlings have been using a quarter square mile of river bottom woods along the Wolf River and on the eastern side of the city for a night roost, which is in soft maple, box elder, ash—none over 25 feet high and very heavily leaved. In the end of July an accumulation of Martins and Starlings were roosting there. On the 4th of August I estimated roughly that from 800 to 1000 Martins and some 8000 Starlings regularly used the roost. The Starlings began coming into the roost at 6:30 p. m. and up to 7:20, flock after flock—usually about 50 but plenty 100, 200, 300, and once 400—poured in in black streams and clouds with all manner of aerial evolutions, flock weaving together, then falling apart, circling in great wheels, then again forming balls of birds, great ovals never hitting one another. Nor was there any confusion or conflict in the masses of birds drifting slowly like smoke or pouring down with a rush of wings as of heavy wind in the trees. The noise of their chattering and squeaking was like the escape of steam from a locomotive. Once in the morning they rose as one mass, forming a mighty mushroom, spreading out and eventually going off in flocks. The roar of their wings was tremendous. The Martins always wait until the Starlings are in and they gradually drop down in a separate area. On September 22, they rose as a mass and left, going downriver way southwest, down the Wolf river valley.

Starlings first came to New London in 1930. January 18 I saw the first flock of 12 flying toward the cemetery in late afternoon. That night at supper time two of my Scout lads brought in a Starling they

saw trying to find shelter in the rim of the gravel pit. It was 16 below zero and windy. They had no difficulty in catching it as it was nearly frozen. It died as it came into the warm house and is now in the museum. The next spring a farmer phoned me to come and see some strange birds that had built in a hole in the cornice of his barn. They were a pair of Starlings and a nestling had fallen out. It is in the museum also. From so small a beginning and the end is not yet in sight!

AUGUST FIELD NOTES BY N. R. BARGER, EDITOR

(Kindly send field notes to N. R. Barger, 132 Lathrop St., Madison, Wisconsin, at the end of each month. Use A. O. U. order.)

Although August is usually dull for observing, many interesting records were made.

Many American Egret Records

Gatterdam writes that Emil Liers, who lives about eighteen miles from LaCrosse, located a nest of Egrets this summer close to his home. Both men also have seen a number of Egrets along the Mississippi. Miss Morse saw one, Aug. 24, and one Aug. 30 in Vernon County. Most of the other reports come from Jefferson County, where Buss et al counted fifty, Aug. 24 and smaller flocks, Aug. 8 and Aug. 31. He believes most of them arrived about the first week in August. Scott et al counted but five in Dodge County, Aug. 22.

A Red-legged Black Duck record, Aug. 27, in Green Bay by Strehlow, is the first we have received of this sub-species this fall. Many species of ducks, usually regarded as non-breeders in southern Wisconsin have been found there this summer. They are as follows: A small flock of Pintail in Dane County, Aug. 27 (Barger); three or four Green-winged Teal in the southern portion of Dane County, Aug. 30, (F. Jones); thirty Redhead Ducks in Dodge County, Aug. 22 (Scott) —most of which were immature; several young Ruddy Ducks in Dane County, Aug. 13 (Zimmerman); a Hooded Merganser in Vernon County, Aug. 16 (Miss Morse); one in Waukesha County, Aug. 17 (Jones); and a few in Green Bay, throughout August (Paulson); a female American Merganser with one young near Appelton, Aug. 6 (Mrs. Rogers); and seventeen of the latter species were in Green Bay, Aug. 24 (Strehlow). Up in Florence County where mergansers breed regularly, Feeny reports a good number of Red-breasted Mergansers on the rivers. Blue-winged Teal had a good year in many places (Zimmerman); and a pair of Lesser Scaups with one immature was found at Manitowoc, Aug. 10 by King.

The Goshawk made its first appearance in Green Bay, Aug. 17 (Strehlow) and was seen twice thereafter. An immature Osprey, able to fly was seen in Burnett County, Aug. 7 by Zimmerman. Pigeon Hawks were observed as follows: One, near Wausau, Aug. 27 (Becker); one in Marinette County, Aug. 10 (Mr. and Mrs. Hussong); one in Green Bay, Aug. 23 (Holterman) and two in Marinette County, Aug. 22 (Richter). The latter observer had a good opportunity to watch the Sparrow Hawk eating grasshoppers, Aug. 23.

Excellent Shorebird Counts

Florida Gallinules were out with broods, Aug. 1 at Appleton (Mrs. Rogers); and Aug. 12 in Madison (Buss). Broods varied from two to nine. Four Killdeer half-grown were found Aug. 5 in Waukesha by Rossman. Jones reports three Golden Plover in Waukesha County, Aug. 17; and two Black-bellied Plovers reached Racine, Aug. 4 (Prins). Hussong counted ten of the latter in Neenah, Aug. 18. The last date

for the Upland Plover in Green Bay was Aug. 21 (Strehlow); and in Jefferson County, Aug. 27 (Buss). The Prins Bros. report both the Willet and Knot, Aug. 30 at Racine. There were three of the latter. The White-rumped Sandpiper appeared in Jefferson County, Aug. 3 and Aug. 31 (Buss). The Baird's Sandpiper is mentioned, Aug. 7 for Waukesha (Jones) and for Jefferson County, Aug. 31 (Buss). The Red-backed Sandpiper had arrived also on the latter date. The Long-billed Dowitcher arrived Aug. 13 and 14 at Appleton (Mrs. Roger) which is about the average. A Dowitcher, answering the description of the Alberta variety, was observed at close range with a telescope, in Dane County, Aug. 27 (Barger). Philip noted the Stilt Sandpiper, Aug. 10 in Waukesha; and eighteen were counted by Buss and he in Jefferson County, Aug. 31. Sanderlings appeared Aug. 10, in Manitowoc (King) and were in numbers by the 24th. Mueller noted them in Milwaukee, Aug. 20, and Prins, in Racine, Aug. 22. Dates for the Wilson Phalarope are: Aug. 7, Waukesha (Jones) and Aug. 31, Jefferson County (Buss).

Bonaparte's Gulls and the four usual species of terns were present at Milwaukee, Aug. 4. The terns were the Forster's, Common, Caspian and Black. The Forster's Tern reached Madison, Aug. 12 (Buss); and were very numerous in Green Bay, Aug. 25 (Strehlow).

Observers along Lake Michigan report a good Nighthawk migration throughout the month of August. Rossman banded two Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, in Waukesha, Aug. 19. August records of the Raven are in Rusk and Marinette Counties by Feeny and the Husongs respectively. Rossman reports Cliff Swallows feeding young in three nests Aug. 5, in Waukesha. Miss Morse states that the pair of Titmice may still be seen in Tower Hill State Park, where she found them Aug. 19. Six Red-breasted Nuthatches were counted by Kendall, in Kewaunee County, Aug. 20. Although these may have been on their migration trip, they could have been summer residents. The earliest return date of the Olive-backed Thrush is Aug. 22, when Ed. Prins saw one at Racine. Warblers returned as follows: Cape-May, Aug. 1, by Strehlow at Green Bay; Myrtle and Black-throated Green, Aug. 27, by Mrs. Peirce at Racine; Pine Warbler, Aug. 13, by Rossman at Waukesha; Palm Warbler, Aug. 27, by Mrs. Peirce at Racine; and Northern Water-thrush, Aug. 5, by Ed. Prins at Racine. Becker saw several Nashville Warblers in Wood County, Aug. 20. The last Yellow Warbler recorded at Green Bay was Aug. 24 (Strehlow). Feeny found both the Black-throated Blue and the Chestnut-sided Warblers in Florence County, Aug. 21.

Bobolinks were feeding young out of the nest, Aug. 1 near Appleton (Mrs. Rogers). A late record for the Dickcissel was made Aug. 30, in Jefferson County, where Buss et al saw a single specimen. The Purple Finch arrived, Aug. 27 in Racine (Mrs. Peirce). Juncos were present in Green Bay throughout the month.

We introduce the following two observers:

John Schaeffer, 2168 No. 37 Street, Milwaukee. Now twenty-one years old, Schaeffer has nine years of bird work back of him. He is secretary for the Milwaukee Bird Club, and takes special interest in shorebirds, wintering ducks and boreal-marine bird life. Schaeffer discovered an immature Atlantic Kittiwake in February, 1937, near the Milwaukee Filtration Plant. A machinist by trade at present.

Elton Bussewitz, State Fish Hatchery, Madison. A recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Bussewitz is now employed in the game management division of the Conservation Department. He has studied birds for the past twelve years, especially around Watertown. Bussewitz is a member also of the Kumlain Bird Club, and is especially interested in the song habits of the Robin.

BY THE WAYSIDE

(Editor's note: These notes prepared by special request of the editor as they refer to possible nesting of American Egrets at Hustisford, Jefferson county.)

Appearance observed as follows: Old birds (I saw only one at the particular time when I saw the young bird) had plumes extending beyond the tail; a yellow bill and black legs and feet.

The young bird had short wings, a rather plump body and what appeared to be a crest on the head. The bill and legs were colored similarly as the older one. It was apparently not an accomplished flier.

I first noticed the old birds on May 17th and first noticed the young bird on June 20th together with the old one while they were perched on the upper limbs of a young ash tree on a small island in the northwest corner of Lake Sinissippi at Hustisford. More specifically in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 31 of the Township of Hubbard. A nearby nest revealed nothing but a mere fragment of what might have been a bluish-green egg. Due to the extreme wariness of the birds, all attempts at photography failed.

The same year (1939) I observed no less than 40 adult birds over the entire lake area (a count made before dawn on Labor Day).

Though numerous people of the vicinity could verify their numbers during that year, unfortunately I was the only one to observe what I have every reason to believe was a locally incubated and reared bird.

Conservation Warden Dan Trainer of Princeton reports seeing about 90 Sandhill Cranes four miles north of Princeton and states that they cleaned up two double wagonloads of corn for a farmer in that vicinity. The birds arrived on September 25 and were still there through October 3. This past summer he heard young Cranes in the White River marshes in that same locality.

E. B. Hurst, a forester with the Consolidated Water and Paper Company of Wisconsin Rapids, located 57 Ruffed Grouse nests this past summer on a 1,000 acre tract of land in Forest county. He stated that there was an average of 11 eggs per nest with many broods of young observed after hatching.

An albino cliff swallow was seen by George Curran two miles west of Horicon on August 15. The bird was identified by observing its companion which had normal plumage.

Conservation Warden Willard Laesch observed what he believed to be a flock of Brant on Hope lake, Jefferson county, on the morning of September 30. He watched them for some time with binoculars at a distance of one-quarter mile and stated that he first thought they were Cormorant as they were twice as big as a Black Mallard but was more sure that they were Brant after he saw them fly.

Joe Alexander of the Conservation Department reports seeing a scattered flock of 11 Ravens on Island lake in Vilas county on October 16. The birds were flying against a fast wind and seemed to travel twice as fast as Crows with a more pronounced bend in the wing. As he feels that such flocks of Ravens are unusual, the Editor is requesting any other reports of large groups of Ravens observed.

An albino tree swallow was reported by Paulson at Green Bay on August 20.

During the summer, eight Swamp Sparrows were examined by Throne, all of which were parasitized by a species of small fly (*hippoboscidae*).

Mueller reports finding four Robins, a Sora Rail and a Vesper Sparrow which showed symptoms of tularemia.

John R. Schmidt of Plymouth reports a flock of about 30 Canada Geese headed northwest over Plymouth on July 31. He also found

Cowbird parasitism in the nests of the Yellow Warbler and the Scarlet Tanager this past summer and sends in the following interesting notes: "On June 22, I came upon female Virginia Rail and five very small young in a black down stage. I noticed that the method the parent bird used in feeding the young was different from that of other species, for she picked up food and dropped it on a clear spot in front of the young, which hurriedly picked it up. . . . I found a Robin of the year still in the nest, although it was fully feathered. The reason was it had a deformed bill. Both mandibles were hooked in the same manner as those of the Crossbill. Another Robin, with but few spots remaining on its breast, completely lacked any vestige of its upper mandible, thus making the slight upward curve in the lower mandible very pronounced. It called and was evidently able to feed itself."

NEWS NOTES

Material donated to the library of the Society has been received and acknowledged from the following: Irvan O. Buss, 2 reprints; Chandler S. Robbins, several periodicals; Professor Aldo Leopold, 3 reprints.

A. C. Bent, 140 High street, Taunton, Mass., reports that he has finished work on the 15th volume of his series of bulletins on the life histories of North American birds which contains material on the **Corvidae** and the **Paridae** and is now beginning work on the next volume, which will contain all birds on the 1931 check list from the **Sittidae** to the **Mimidae**, inclusive. He would like to receive as soon as possible any notes, data, or photographs you may have regarding the six families in this group.

George C. Becker, Port Edwards, Wis., is collecting material on the Pileated Woodpecker and anyone who has records on this bird for Wisconsin and has not received his questionnaire card could assist him in this work by writing to him at the address mentioned.

The Wilson Ornithological Club, as well as the Inland Bird Banding Assn., will hold their joint meeting at Champaign-Urbana, Illinois on November 21-23 inclusive. Special features on the program are a bird ecology symposium and a field trip to Lake Chatauqua Wildlife Refuge. Further details can be secured by writing the secretary of the Wilson Club, O. S. Pettingill, Jr., Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota.

The Passenger Pigeon Monument Committee met at the home of Owen Gromme in Milwaukee on October 20 to lay final plans for the erection of this monument in spring if possible. Phil Sander, Clarence Jung, and Miss Elizabeth Oehlenschlaeger attended the meeting.

The Society welcomes into its membership the son and daughter of Alonzo W. Pond of Mt. Horeb, Miss Chomingwen Pond and Arthur Pond. Mr. Pond, who has done considerable bird work in Wisconsin years ago, is now in charge of the Cave of the Mounds located near Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, and is largely responsible for preserving its natural beauty for the public.

The 59th Annual Meeting of the American Ornithologists Union was held at the Colorado Museum of Natural History, Denver on September 1-6, with an attendance of about 400 people. Wisconsin members in attendance were Miss Elizabeth Oehlenschlaeger and Walter Mueller, while several other Society members from out of state were also present. Frederick Hamerstrom, Jr., recently of Wisconsin, was elected a member of the Union. It is reported that the same officers as last year were re-elected and that the program was very successful, with several excellent field trips to the nearby prairie and also to the high mountain altitudes. Highlight of the trip for Walter Mueller was the opportunity to observe a Duck Hawk strike and knock down five Ducks, one after another, three of which managed to escape.

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Send manuscripts to the editor, field notes to the field note department editor, and banding data to the bird banders' department editor.

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