GENERAL NOTES

Fla. Field Nat. 8(2): 46, 1980

A specimen of the Blue-faced Booby in northwest Florida.—On 8 September 1979, as Brooks and Lyn Atherton and I walked along the beach near Bald Point, Franklin County, Florida, Brooks noticed a weathered bird skull on the sand well above the high-tide mark. We agreed that it appeared to be the skull of a Gannet (*Morus bassanus*), but a later comparison with sulid study skins in the Tall Timbers Research Station's collection indicated that it was too small for that species.

I sent the specimen to Storrs L. Olson, National Museum of Natural History; he wrote (17 Sept. 1979) that it was the skull of a Blue-faced Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) and described the differences between the skull of that species and those of *M. bassanus*, *S. sula*, *S. leucogaster*, and *S. nebouxii*.

Although frequently seen at the Dry Tortugas and collected there by Paul Bartsch (Howell 1932), the Blue-faced Booby is seldom encountered in other parts of Florida. Along the coast of northwest Florida I note the following published sight records: two at Destin, 14 July 1950 (Lowery and Newman 1951); single birds off Pensacola "considered to be of this species" on 14 May 1933 and 27 July 1952 (Weston 1965); six seen about 9 miles off St. Marks Light, 23 April 1966 (Cunningham 1966; the *corrigendum* I published for this record [Stevenson 1967: 561] was based on a misunderstanding); one at Santa Rosa Island, 31 March 1976 (Hamilton 1976). However, the only prior specimen from northwest Florida was one picked up alive by Mary Ann Olson at Panama City Beach on 8 June 1978. Shortly after its demise, Storrs L. Olson prepared the bird as a study skin for the National Museum of Natural History (Jackson and Cooley 1978). The skull from Bald Point is number 3657 in the Tall Timbers collection.

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Little Blue Heron breeding bare-part coloration and plumage characteristics.—Great change in bare-part coloration during the breeding season is characteristic of ardeids (Palmer 1962, Handbook of North American birds, vol. 1, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press; Cramp and Simmons 1977, Handbook of the birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, vol. 1, Cambridge, Oxford Univ. Press). Information I gathered in Tampa Bay, Hillsborough County, Florida, on known age Little Blue Herons (*Florida caerulea*) marked with individually numbered leg streamers differs from Palmer's (1962) description of Little Blue Herons.

By February adult Little Blue Herons assume the definitive alternate plumage (described in Palmer 1962) and begin acquiring breeding bare-part coloration associated with courtship: iris grayish-green; orbital skin and base of bill turquoise-cobalt; bill tip, legs and feet black. I observed no differences between the sexes. By the ninth day after pair formation, beginning with the orbital region adjacent to the feathers, these colors begin to slowly fade to the non-courtship coloration: iris yellowish-cream; orbital skin and base of the bill light gray; bill tip black; legs and feet grayish-green.

Many subadult Little Blue Herons (i.e. calico plumaged) first participate in breeding activities at age 10-13 months (Rodgers 1978, Natl. Audubon Soc. Res. Rept. No. 7: 35-39). Their breeding bare-part colors exhibit variation: iris yellowish to whitish; orbital skin and base of bill pale turquoise-cobalt; bill tip black; legs and feet grayish-green to light gray. The nonbreeding colors are similar to those of older juveniles (described by McVaugh 1972, Living Bird 11: 155-173). By 10 months of age subadults generally exhibit evidence of slate-colored feathers that give the crest, lower neck and scapular regions a grayish appearance. In addition, many coverts, some secondaries, primaries and scapular feathers are slate-colored. By 12-14 months of age, the subadult acquires the basic II plumage (described in Palmer 1962).

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Swallow-tailed Kite predation on nestling Mockingbird and Loggerhead Shrike.—Swallow-tailed Kites (*Elanoides forficatus*) have been observed taking nestlings of the following species: Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*, in Florida (Stevenson 1958); Tropical Kingbird, *Tyrannus melancholicus*, in Costa Rica (Skutch 1965); Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*, in Texas (Pope 1913, Simmons 1925); Clay-colored Thrush, *Turdus grayi*, Golden-masked Tanager, *Tangara larvata*, in Costa Rica (Skutch 1965); Painted Bunting, *Passerina ciris*, in Texas (Simmons 1925). However, observers at kite nests often are not able to identify what bird species the kites are bringing to their nestlings because the prey is either unfeathered (Snyder 1974 and pers. comm.) or has been plucked (Wright et al. 1970). We here report two additional cases of Swallow-tailed Kite predation on nestling birds in Florida.

On 14 May 1978, Chester and Marsha Winegarner saw a Swallow-tailed Kite, soaring over a slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) grove in a pasture 12 km south of Lake Placid, Highlands County, Florida, suddenly drop down onto a low myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*). The kite paused briefly before flying off with an object in its bill and a Mockingbird in hot pursuit. The oak contained a Mockingbird nest with two small nestlings located one m above ground.

On 3 July 1979, Fred and Edward Lohrer watched two Swallow-tailed Kites circling low over an isolated 5 m live oak (*Q. virginiana*) in a pasture 8 km southwest of Sebring, Highlands County, Florida. The kites were being chased by a Mockingbird and a Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*). Suddenly one of the kites flew into the crown of the tree, paused briefly with flapping wings, and then flew off in level flight holding a large screaming nestling in its feet. Two shrikes persistently chased and dove at the kite for a quarter of a mile until the kite soared upwards. The other kite flew away without visiting the nest. Although Lohrer could not inspect the nest or identify the nestling, the behavior of the shrikes and the nest location suggests the nestling was probably a shrike.

On 2 July 1979 Lohrer watched a Swallow-tailed Kite flying at an altitude of about 25 m over patches of scrub and pine flatwoods 5 km south of Lake Placid. As the kite flew over a sand pine (*Pinus clausa*) and into Lohrer's back yard it abruptly changed direction, flew to