BRIEF FIELD NOTES

CONFIRMATION OF MISSISSIPPI BARN OWLS BREEDING IN OCTOBER

Natasha Murphy and Scott A. Rush - Department of Wildlife, Aquaculture and Fisheries, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762.

Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) are found on every continent except Antarctica, making them one of the most cosmopolitan terrestrial bird species (Campbell 2003). They are generally found at low elevations in open habitats, such as grasslands, deserts, marshes and agricultural fields (Campbell 2003). Peak nesting for this species occurs in spring and fall in temperate parts of its range, with warmer regions exhibiting year-round breeding and more frequent second clutches. Within the United States, Barn Owls have been recorded breeding year-round (Otteni et al. 1972, Smith et al. 1974).

Previous observations across Mississippi have noted Barn Owls nesting and egg-laying throughout the year (Key 1994, Key 1995, Turcotte and Watts 1999). Key (1995) described Barn Owls initiating nesting in October in Cleveland, Bolivar County. Turcotte and Watts (1999) also notes that Barn Owls will breed in October within Mississippi. Thus, while Barn Owl October breeding in Mississippi is not novel, here we note breeding in October for Barn Owls in a county, Clay, in which it has never

been recorded. In this short note, we examine a nest site in Clay County which was visited twice in October 2019.

We visited a nest which was located in a man-made nest box placed inside a covered bridge (33.65072°, -88.57331°), surrounded by a diversified cattle and row crop operation. The nest contained four chicks on the first exploratory visit (17 October 2019). On the second visit (31 October 2019), four chicks were banded. Chicks weighed 400-600 g, with un-flattened wing chord lengths 89-166 mm and ages ranging 21-36 days. Visual checks for ectoparasites were carried out, and we noted that no chicks were found to be carrying visible ectoparasites (i.e. fly genus *Carnus*).

We found no citizen science records of Barn Owls breeding in October in Clay County. A search through eBird, a citizen science database of bird observations, for all Barn Owl records from 1990-2019 during fall (September-November) in Clay County shows no additional breeding record (eBird 2019). There is one other record for Clay County outside of this period, a breeding record in March 2017 (eBird 2019). Our finding thus augments the known locations of fall breeding sites for this species.

Anecdotal evidence collected in 2018 and 2019 from this same location suggests that some individuals in this population may focus their hunting efforts during the spring breeding season entirely on a single species of small mammal, the hispid cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*). Specialist predators, such as Barn Owls, are often highly dependent on their prey species, and fluctuations or declines in prey can impact Barn Owl reproductive success (Klol and de Roos 2007). To further our knowledge of Barn Owl reproductive patterns in Mississippi, we aim to compare breeding outcome, fledgling condition, habitat use (using GPS and remote sensing data), and diets of fall nesting owls to spring nesters in 2020. By studying the diets of Barn Owls in Mississippi, we hope to provide valuable information on differences in spring and fall adult nesting behavior and reproductive success, chick

vulnerability, and ultimately tie this information to prey distribution and abundance.

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CATTLE EGRET FORAGING BEHIND WHITE-TAILED DEER

Steve Peterson - 2127 E. Northside Dr., Jackson, MS 39211.

On 16 August 2019, at approximately 1815 hrs, I drove into the Mayes Lake section of LeFleur's Bluff State Park in Jackson for a quick look, especially for wading birds. I drove along the road leading to the campground and the Pearl River boat ramp. At the point where the road turns back around on itself, I stopped to check a slough that has had most of the waders usually found in the park show up to feed, including White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) and Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*). This slough was about 3 m below road level and fairly open above. The water was usually about 15-30 cm deep.

On most days several white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) fed on vegetation while wading in the water. There were a couple of deer feeding on this date along with Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*), Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), a Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), and one Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), which in my experience was unusual to find in the park. The Cattle Egret began following one of the deer, and they both waded at the water's edge. At least twice the Cattle Egret was able to snap up some type of prey item apparently stirred up by the deer. I wasn't able to identify what the prey was.