

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Russell, a winter plumaged bird at the Pascagoula area as described above (Weber and Jackson 1978).

Literature Cited

- Gates, L.J. 1976. Northern Phalarope in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Mississippi Kite 6:37.
 Sanders, J.A. 1976. A Northern Phalarope in Attala County, Mississippi. Mississippi Kite 6:36.
 Weber, W.C. and J.A. Jackson. 1978. Birds around the state - fall migration, 1977. Mississippi Kite 8:19-27.

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A Brant on East Ship Island: First Record for Mississippi

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On 1 July 1978, while on the east spit of East Ship Island, I discovered an adult Brant (Branta bernicla) feeding along the edge of a shallow pond. I watched the bird from about 15:00 to 15:30, using a 15-45X spotting scope at distances of 20-125 m. The Brant could fly quite well, although it appeared to have a slight limp when walking.

Field notes made on the spot are as follows: "A small, short-necked goose appearing not much larger than Mallard. Head and neck black except for small horizontal white mark ("half-collar") on each side of neck. Back dark brown, wings somewhat darker. Tail black; rump white or pale. Underparts white (esp. abdomen and under-tail coverts) except for some brownish on flanks and upper breast. Bill and legs black." This clearly describes an adult Brant of the eastern or Atlantic race, Branta bernicla hrota.

Brant are occasionally kept in captivity, and it is possible that the bird I saw was an escaped captive. For an opinion on this matter, I wrote Richard Ryan, director of the Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange, N.J., who is quite knowledgeable about the frequency with which various bird species are kept in captivity. Mr. Ryan's reply (letter of 29 September 1978) reads in part: "... Atlantic race Brant are fairly rare in captivity and most of those found in ... collections are "salvaged" birds, i.e., cripples placed in captivity because of ... wing damage ... Atlantic Brant are notoriously difficult to breed in captivity, and ... tend to lay eggs in June, so that the usual source of escapes (young of the year) would be almost impossible in a fully-feathered, flying bird in July.

... Black Brant are the usual breeding Brant in collections... Wild Brant summering on the East Coast are not really rare and are often relatively tame (injured or illness)... the chances of [your bird] being an escape are really quite slim."

Lowery (1974) makes passing reference to a Brant "in Mississippi Sound off Pass Christian" in January 1961. I wrote the Museum of Zoology at Louisiana State University, and received the following information from Erika Tallman: the Brant in question was apparently heard (but not seen) by a "Mr. Vardaman," and reported to Dr. Lowery in a letter from Mrs. H.A.J. Evans of New Orleans. Despite further inquiries, I have been unable to positively identify "Mr. Vardaman" or to obtain any additional facts about this observation. In view of the fact that this record is based on a second-hand report of a bird heard, but not seen, by an observer of unknown competence, it must be considered questionable.

The nearest regular wintering area for Brant is coastal North Carolina (Bellrose 1976). There are 3 records of Brant from Alabama: 2 from the Tennessee Valley and one from Birmingham (Imhof 1976a, 1976b), and 3 records from coastal Louisiana, including one of the western Black Brant, Branta bernicla nigricans (Lowery 1974). All these birds were seen in late fall, winter, or early spring (21 Oct through 1 May), and the Ship Island bird is evidently the first seen in summer on the north-central Gulf Coast. It could have reached coastal Mississippi sometime the previous winter or spring, and sustained some injury, which later healed but which caused it to remain into summer.

Literature Cited

- Bellrose, F.C. 1976. Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, Pa.
- Imhof, T.A. 1976a. The Season, Winter-Spring: December 1975 through May 1976. Alabama Birdlife 24:10-14.
- Imhof, T.A. 1976b. Alabama Birds, 2nd ed. University of Alabama Press, University, Ala.
- Lowery, G.H., Jr. 1974. Louisiana Birds, 3rd ed. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge.