

## **BRIEF FIELD NOTES**



### **AN UNUSUAL FORAGING BEHAVIOR IN A GRAY CATBIRD (*DUMETELLA CAROLINENSIS*)**

Robert L. Jones and Rebecca S. Jones - 1287 East Deer Ridge Rd.  
Brandon, MS 39042.

The Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), whose diet is composed primarily of insects and fruits, inhabits relatively dense shrubby habitats during the nesting season in Mississippi (Turcotte and Watts 1999). We assisted in repairing a house that had abundant shrubby vegetation in much of its backyard in Picayune, Pearl River County, for several weekends during the summer of 2019. The house was built during the late 1930s or early 1940s, was rectangular in shape, and was approximately 7 m wide and 13 m in length. It had a conventional foundation with piers that elevated it, depending upon the slope, approximately 30.5-46 cm above the ground. We noticed Gray Catbirds in the backyard of the house from May through July, and assumed that they were nesting nearby.

On 27 July 2019, we observed Gray Catbirds feeding a fledgling close to the house, confirming our hypothesis that they were nesting in the vicinity. On one occasion, a Gray Catbird landed near the base of the house approximately 1.5 m from where we were working. It looked at us for a few seconds, and then ran beneath the house. We remained stationary to avoid disturbing it,

but were able to bend down low enough to confirm that the bird was well under the house rather than just at its edge. After approximately 90 s, the Gray Catbird emerged from beneath the house carrying an earthworm. It flew to some nearby bushes and fed the earthworm to a fledgling. The point where the Gray Catbird went beneath the house and then reemerged was near the middle of the house's longer side and approximately 6 m from its front.

Although foraging by a Gray Catbird beneath a house may appear to be unusual, the conditions it encountered there may not be that much different from what it normally encounters while foraging in its nesting habitat. Much of the foraging for invertebrates by Gray Catbirds is done on or near the ground (Crossley 2011), and as such, they may be used to foraging under the reduced light conditions of their dense shrubby nesting habitats. Although the amount of light beneath the house was probably less than that beneath dense shrubbery, the height of the piers and the relatively narrow width of the house were apparently sufficient to allow enough light for the Gray Catbird to capture a prey item. It should also be noted that this was a relatively new behavior for the Gray Catbirds in this yard, as the house had been skirted with a solid metal barrier extending from its base to the ground prior to early July.

#### **LITERATURE CITED**

- Crossley, R. 2011. *The Crossley ID Guide*. Crossley Books, Princeton University Press, Princeton. 527 pp.
- Turcotte, W.H. and D.L. Watts. 1999. *Birds of Mississippi*. University Press of Mississippi, Jackson. 455 pp.