

Bent, on page 13 of 'Life Histories of North American Gulls and Terns,' 1921, mentions this state in his list of spring arrival dates as, "North Carolina, Cape Hatteras, April 18," but a recent search through his original data, now in the Bureau of Biological Survey, by Mr. Frederick C. Lincoln, failed to disclose this record.—H. H. BRIMLEY, *State Museum, Raleigh, N. C.*

**A Curious Habit of Gulls.**<sup>1</sup>—On September 24, 1933, a flock of Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) had congregated at the eastern end of Fairfield Beach, Fairfield, Conn., the tide being nearly out. The location is near the mouth of a creek and the currents of water change the contour of the shore line from year to year. This year a small sand islet is exposed at low tide leaving a shallow strip of water about thirty feet wide between it and the shore.

Many of the Gulls were standing in this shallow water and, as I approached, I noticed a curious rhythmical splashing sound, like *slop-slop-slop-slop* continuing indefinitely. Observation showed that a dozen or more of the Gulls were producing the sound by moving their feet up and down as though marking time. The several birds kept well together in the movement so that it rather suggested a dance. Now and then one of them would cease its movements, or another one begin them, but some of the birds were performing all of the ten or fifteen minutes that I watched them. I timed them and found that there were regularly thirty-two foot movements in five seconds, or sixteen with each foot.

Most of the birds engaged in this movement seemed to be looking about indifferently, but once one of them suddenly ceased and darted its bill into the mud and water at its feet, evidently obtaining something edible, though just what I could not determine.

On several other occasions this fall I observed the same thing at this place, when the tide was low, and on November 9, noted Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) with the Herring Gulls, also indulging in the habit. I failed to note this performance at any other point along the coast where Gulls feed at low tide and I find no reference to the habit in the literature at my disposal. Dr. Witmer Stone, however, tells me that the habit has been recorded by several English writers.

I am inclined to think that the birds were attempting to stir up some edible creatures that were hiding in the mud, perhaps marine worms; and that conditions at this particular spot made such a habit useful to them.—  
ARETAS A. SAUNDERS, 48 Longview Ave., Fairfield, Conn.

**A Key to the Owls of the Genus *Pulsatrix* Kaup.**—Owing chiefly, no doubt, to paucity of material, species of the genus *Pulsatrix* have been much confused in ornithological literature. A key to the species and subspecies is here given in the hope that it will be of use to workers in the museum and field.

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<sup>1</sup> Published with the aid of the Dwight Memorial Fund. Cf. also Condor, 1934, p. 32. [Ed.]

- a. Larger, wing more than 325 mm.; toes feathered to near the claws; primaries and tail not distinctly barred with whitish or buffy; tail less than three-fifths the length of wing; culmen rounded.

(Subgenus *Pulsatrix* Kaup.)

- b. Head and hind neck chocolate brown, not darker than back; superciliary line not pure white; not extending beyond eye; lores not pure white; only a touch of white on foreneck; toes with only two scales of equal breadth at base of nails; tail always more than 198 mm. long. (Santa Catharina, Brazil, to Chaco, Paraguay.)

*Pulsatrix pulsatrix* (Wied.)

- b'. Head and hind neck sooty or blackish brown, darker than back; superciliary line pure white, extending beyond eye and down around edge of facial rim to sides of neck; large patch of white covering foreneck and extending around to sides of neck; toes with three scales of equal breadth at base of nails; tail usually less than 198 mm. long. (Oaxaca, Mexico, to northern Argentina.)

*Pulsatrix perspicillata* (Latham).

- c. Smaller, wing averaging less than 335 mm.; lower breast and abdomen very light whitish or ochraceous buff; lower hind neck and back not sooty or blackish.

- d. Crown blackish; hind neck dusky or grayish brown; abdomen moderately light buffy. (Venezuela to the Guianas, Matto Grosso, Brazil, and eastern Ecuador.)

*Pulsatrix perspicillata perspicillata* (Latham).

- d'. Crown dusky or light brown; hind neck light brown; abdomen very light buffy. (Island of Trinidad, off Venezuela.)

*Pulsatrix perspicillata trinitatis* Bangs and Penard.

- c'. Larger, wing averaging more than 335 mm.; lower breast and abdomen deep buff; lower hind neck and back sooty blackish, as dark as the crown.

- e. Lower breast, and abdomen, and sometimes the legs, more or less barred with sooty blackish. (Oaxaca, Mexico, to Costa Rica and Pacific Coast of western Panama.)

*Pulsatrix perspicillata saturata* Ridgway.

- e'. Lower breast, abdomen, and legs not barred with sooty blackish.

- f. Upper parts and sides of face deeper sooty black; longest feathers of sides of female less than 145 mm. long; abdomen very deep buff. (Escazu, Costa Rica and Caribbean slope of eastern Panama through Colombia to western Ecuador.)

*Pulsatrix perspicillata chapmani* Griscom.

- f'. Upper parts and sides of face lighter, more of a grayish sooty black; abdomen moderately deep tawny buff;

longest feathers of sides of female more than 150 mm. long. (Southern Bolivia and northern Argentina.)

*Pulsatrix perspicillata boliviana*<sup>1</sup> Kelso.

a'. Smaller, wing less than 320 mm.; toes bare; primaries and tail distinctly barred with whitish or buffy; tail more than three fifths the length of wing; culmen acutish. (Subgenus *Novipulsatrix* Kelso.)<sup>1</sup>

g. Lores and superciliary stripe almost or quite pure white; ground color of lower breast and abdomen white, with regular bars of dark brown bordered with blackish on their upper side; wing less than 290 mm. (Eastern Ecuador to eastern Peru.)

*Pulsatrix melanonota* (Tschudi).

g'. Lores and superciliary stripe buff to deep orange buff; ground color of lower breast and abdomen deep buff or tawny buff, with irregular and indistinct bars of dusky not bordered with black on their upper side; wing more than 290 mm. (Esperitu Santo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to Chaco, Paraguay, and Misiones, Argentina.)

*Pulsatrix koeniswaldiana* (Bertoni).

—LEON KELSO, *Washington, D. C.*

**Owls on a Louisiana Highway.**—On October 1, 1933, while riding down the new "Air-Line Highway" from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, I noticed a large Owl lying dead on the highway. I stopped and found that it was a Great Horned Owl (*Bubo v. virginianus*), evidently struck and killed by an automobile. I had gone scarcely a hundred yards farther when I found another of the same species, and then another. I was passing through a big swamp near New Orleans, and the road seemed literally lined with dead Owls. On the ten mile stretch of highway through the swamp, I counted no less than seventeen large Owls, lying dead by the road side. I examined several, and found two species, Great Horned Owls and Southern Barred Owls (*Strix varia alleni*).

This highway had only been open a few weeks, and evidently the big Owls living in the depths of the swamp were bewildered and blinded by the lights of the automobiles. The rest of the inhabitants of the swamp seemed to fare better, for the only other bird seen dead on the road between New Orleans and Baton Rouge was a Southern Blue Jay.—WILLIAM B. WARD, *Timmons ville, S. C.*

**The Saw-whet Owl in Oklahoma.**—On November 29, 1933, the Museum of Birds and Mammals received, in the flesh, an adult female Saw-whet Owl (*Cryptoglaux acadica acadica*) collected near Eva, Texas County, Oklahoma, by Miss Eleanor Henderson.

Texas County is the central one of three counties in the narrow strip of land between Kansas and Texas. It is an arid region, with no timber except a few scrubby trees along the watercourses. Since the bird was in too poor condition to skin, it was prepared as a skeleton.

<sup>1</sup> Biological leaflet No. 1, July 25, 1933, p. 1.