

BIRDS OBSERVED ON THE COAST OF
VIRGINIA AND NORTH CAROLINA

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A BRIEF trip to the coast of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, from May 30 to June 2, 1936, afforded an opportunity to determine certain details of bird distribution in that ornithologically little-known region. The party, consisting of A. H. Howell, W. B. Tyrrell, and the writer, camped one night on the ocean beach, about eight miles east of Pungo, Virginia, then drove down the beach to Oregon Inlet, North Carolina, and on the return trip visited Knott's Island, at the head of Currituck Sound. One object of the trip was to learn whether or not the Short-billed Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus stellaris*) was breeding in the marshes back of the ocean beach east of Pungo, where, on May 19, 1932, we had found a number of birds singing and apparently paired, as reported by Howell and Burleigh (*Auk*, vol. 51, p. 250, 1934). On the second trip, however, not a single bird of this species could be found. The southernmost record in the breeding season is that of Dr. Alexander Wetmore, who found a nest at Cornfield Harbor, Maryland (*Auk*, vol. 52, p. 455, 1935). We were interested, also, in learning whether or not the Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacuta diversa*) described by Bishop (*Auk*, vol. 18, p. 269, 1901) was breeding in North Carolina near its type locality. Our search revealed only a colony of Seaside Sparrows (*Ammodramus maritima macgillivraii*) in a marsh at Oregon Inlet. It seems probable, therefore, that the Southern Sharp-tailed Sparrow does not breed south of Virginia.

Following is a list of birds collected or seen near Pungo, Virginia, May 30 and 31, and June 2, 1936:

LITTLE BLUE HERON, *Florida caerulea caerulea*.—A colony of about fifty pairs of nesting Little Blue Herons was noted at Fentress, Virginia, in a pine woods bordering on a State highway, and some distance from any water. The nests were from fifteen to twenty feet from the ground, most of them containing young of varying sizes, some almost ready to fly. The local inhabitants informed me that the birds nested there for the first time in 1935.

BROWN THRASHER, *Toxostoma rufum*.—Thrashers were fairly common in the thickets among the sand hills, back from the ocean beach.

NORTHERN PRAIRIE WARBLER, *Dendroica discolor discolor*.—This warbler was fairly common in the thickets among the sand hills back from the ocean beach. The males were singing.

OVEN-BIRD, *Seiurus aurocapillus*.—Two were heard singing in the woods at Nimmo Church, near Pungo, where we also heard one in May, 1932.

MARYLAND YELLOW-THROAT, *Geothlypis trichas trichas*.—Yellow-throats were common in the thickets among the sand hills; one male was taken. This subspecies is, at Pungo, close to the southern limit of its breeding range.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT, *Icteria virens virens*.—Several were noted in the thickets among the sand dunes.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE, *Cassidix mexicanus major*.—Three single birds were seen along the beach south of Pungo; one was taken about two miles north of False Cape on May 31.

FLORIDA GRACKLE, *Quiscalus quiscula aglaeus*.—A flock of eight birds was seen following a plowman in an orchard; one male was taken on May 30. The only other record of the occurrence of the Florida Grackle in Virginia is that of five specimens collected by W. and H. H. Bailey in mid-May, 1895, at Newport News, and published by Chapman (*Auk*, vol. 52, p. 27, 1935).

ALABAMA TOWHEE, *Pipilo erythrophthalmus canaster*.—One of the most interesting results of our trip was the discovery that the breeding towhee of the southeastern corner of Virginia is the Alabama Towhee. The birds were numerous in the thickets among the sand dunes near the ocean beach. The three birds collected May 30 and 31, are of this race, two of them typical. This extends the known range of this subspecies considerably to the north, and is the first record for the State of Virginia.

EASTERN HENSLOW'S SPARROW, *Passerherbulus henslowi susurrans*.—Only four birds were seen, these in the dry meadows among the sand dunes back of the ocean beach. Certainly they were much less numerous than in 1932, when we visited the same locality. One female was taken on May 30.

ATLANTIC SONG SPARROW, *Melospiza melodia atlantica*.—Small numbers were noted among the sand hills back from the ocean beach. They appeared to be much less numerous than in 1932.

The list of birds taken or seen from the Virginia State Line to Oregon Inlet, North Carolina, May 31 to June 2, 1936, follows:

NORTHERN BALD EAGLE, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus washingtoniensis*.—W. B. Tyrrell, on June 1, examined a nest in a giant pine on Knott's Island that contained two large young.

KING RAIL, *Rallus elegans elegans*.—A pair of this species was seen on a roadway, crossing a salt marsh on Knott's Island, June 1. On firing a shot at them we found that we had killed the female and five young ones about two weeks old. This is of particular interest as another instance of the breeding of this species in a brackish environment.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER, *Charadrius semipalmatus*.—A few were seen at Oregon Inlet May 31 and June 1.

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER, *Squatarola squatarola*.—Common on June 1 along the ocean beach in small flocks, mingling more or less with the smaller shorebirds. More than one hundred were noted, all moving northward.

RUDDY TURNSTONE, *Arenaria interpres morinella*.—Small numbers were seen along the ocean beach on May 31.

AMERICAN KNOT, *Calidris canutus rufus*.—Several flocks of knots were seen on the ocean beach, May 31, all moving northward. They would flush at some distance from the car and circle out over the surf.

SEMPALMATED SANDPIPER, *Ereunetes pusillus*.—Abundant along the ocean beach on May 31, especially at Oregon Inlet. During that moonlight night we could hear shorebirds calling as they flew overhead; but when morning came, all had departed for the north.

HERRING GULL, *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*.—Fairly common along the ocean beach, mainly immature birds.

RING-BILLED GULL, *Larus delawarensis*.—Small numbers were seen along the ocean beach.

LAUGHING GULL, *Larus atricilla*.—Common, especially at Oregon Inlet.

ROYAL TERN, *Thalasseus maximus maximus*.—Two seen at Oregon Inlet.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE, *Cassidix mexicanus major*.—Several were seen along the ocean beach near the Virginia line, also at Pine Island, and eight near Oregon Inlet, one of which was collected.

MACGILLIVRAY'S SEASIDE SPARROW, *Ammodramus maritima macgillivrayi*.—A good-sized colony was found on a dry marsh near Oregon Inlet and six birds were collected. They were nesting in clumps of *Juncus*. Their songs were shorter than those of other races of this species and lacked the trill at the end of the song.

All the specimens secured are in the Biological Survey collection, at the United States National Museum, and have been identified by Dr. Harry C. Oberholser.

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