

GENERAL NOTES

Notes, chiefly distributional, on some Florida birds.—In September, 1955, my wife and I spent two weeks observing Florida birds, and taking a few specimens for the Carnegie Museum. In trying to determine which of our observations were worth placing on record I have had to depend largely on Sprunt's "Florida Bird Life" (1954). Although aware that this book has certain shortcomings as a guide to the current status of Florida birds (see Robertson, 1955. *Everglades Natural History*, 3:55-57), I have not had access to other recent information. Dr. Henry M. Stevenson was therefore kind enough to help me select records for publication.

Ardea occidentalis. Great White Heron.—"Straggles north to the Tamiami Trail in late fall and even farther at times, but not to be expected anywhere north of Cape Sable, or Ten Thousand Islands, with any regularity" (Sprunt, 1954:23). As we crossed San Carlos Bay on the Sanibel Island ferry on September 11, we observed a Great White Heron standing in the shallow water just off Punta Rassa, Lee County.

Dichromanassa rufescens. Reddish Egret.—"Occurs sporadically on the mainland at least as far as Lake Okeechobee in the interior. . ." (Sprunt, 1954:29). One was seen with three Little Blue Herons (*Florida caerulea*) on September 9 near the St. Johns River west of Melbourne, Brevard County, along route 192.

Falco columbarius. Pigeon Hawk.—Sprunt's dates for this species range from September 19 on. We saw one on September 14 as it flew east along the north shore of Bahia Honda Key.

Grus canadensis. Sandhill Crane.—This species is supposedly very rare as far south as Everglades National Park. We saw two at very close range on route 27 just 10 road miles beyond the Royal Palm Ranger Station, Dade County (on the stretch of road which is *not* actually within Everglades Park) on September 13. We were gratified at the large number of cranes we were able to see along the road during the course of our visit to Florida, but surprised at the few young of the year seen. For example, in a flock of 18 seen 10 miles north of Okeechobee on September 16, only two were young birds lacking the patch of bright red skin on the crown.

Charadrius alexandrinus. Snowy Plover.—Sprunt (1954:158) gives Estero Island as the southernmost definite nesting locality, and gives no indication whatsoever as to whether there is any migratory movement in this species in Florida. On September 12 we saw a single Snowy Plover on Marco Island, Collier County, some 35 miles south of Estero.

Columbigallina passerina. Ground Dove.—Verheyen (1953. *Bull. Inst. Royal des Sci. Nat. de Belgique*, 29, no. 27) has published an extensive list of species of birds whose skulls he examined to determine the extent of cranial ossification in adults. Among the Columbidae he examined skulls of *Turtur chalcospilos*, *Treron australis*, *Columba arquatrix*, and *Streptopelia semitorquata*. Of these, in the first species only was the "pneumatization" of the adult cranium complete. In the crania of the other three, a "window" was present in each frontal bone. This was also true of a male specimen of *Columbigallina passerina* which I collected on September 9 at the bridge over the Kissimmee River west of the city of Okeechobee. The plumage and soft-part colors of this Ground Dove were those of an adult, and its testes were quite large (left, 9×3.5 mm.; right 11×4.5 mm.). It would appear that *Columbigallina* may be added to the list of bird genera in which a completely ossified double-layered cranium is not attained with maturity.

Crotophaga ani. Smooth-billed Ani.—On September 8 we discovered a single ani in the scrub on North Merritts Island, Brevard County, along route A1A, 2 miles beyond

the point at which that road leaves route 402. The bird was collected, and proved to be an adult male with testes measuring 9×6 millimeters. It was fat, and had been feeding on insects, mostly grasshoppers. This apparently constitutes a new northernmost locality record for this species, which is purely casual in Florida away from the southern Lake Okeechobee area.

Hirundo rustica. Barn Swallow.—On September 10 we were watching a large flock of Barn Swallows hawking insects over an extensive cane field on the Glades-Hendry county line at route 720. Among them, but impossible to collect, was a beautiful albino. As is so often the case in such abnormally-colored birds, the loss of pigment was differential. Although the upper parts were pure white, the areas of the underparts which are pinkish buff in a normal Barn Swallow were a creamy yellow in this bird.

Vermivora ruficapilla. Nashville Warbler.—On September 14 I was attempting to collect one of a small flock of Prairie Warblers (*Dendroica discolor*) at the west end of Bahia Honda Key. It was a particularly windy day, and I found it difficult to keep track of individual birds as they moved about in a small clump of trees. When I finally did fire, the bird which fell proved to be a Nashville Warbler, a species which I had not realized was present among the Prairie Warbler flock. A trick of the wind had conspired to distribute my shot pattern so that the bird was completely mangled. Being unaware at the time of the extreme rarity of this warbler in Florida, I discarded the specimen. I have since learned from Mrs. Margaret H. Hundley of Key West that there are no previous records of this species from the outer Keys. I have also learned never to discard specimens!—KENNETH C. PARKES, *Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh 13, Pennsylvania, March 29, 1956.*

Golden Eagle attacks decoy duck.—While concealed in a sand-pit duck blind on November 20, 1955, I watched a mature Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) display unusual interest in some decoy ducks. It was a clear, cold day on the South Platte River near Sedgwick, Colorado, and my 20 decoys (11 mallards fronted by nine pintails) fringing the far side of a 15-foot channel were strung out for 30 feet upstream from my willow-bordered blind. The eagle, soaring into the light wind, came in low over the river bottom and alighted at the water's edge directly across the stream and about 20 feet from me. After a few minutes of critical inspection, head cocked first to one side and then the other, the big bird gingerly waded toward the decoy mallard drake, only five feet away, that brought up the rear of the spread. This first advance into the shallow water abruptly changed to a much faster and ungainly backward retreat as the eagle got its "pants" wet. A second entry into the water and hurried exit to land failed to discourage this hungry bird, for, with two quick beats of spread wings, it was in the air three feet above the water and, passing slowly over the decoys, it landed close to the lead decoy—a bright black and white male pintail.

Here the first half-hearted wading effort was quickly followed by a bold approach to the rear of that pintail decoy, which was slowly tacking with the current. Now the eagle spread its wings, reared back and thrust its feet forward to strike the decoy's back with distended talons. That first vicious strike was repeated as soon as the decoy righted from its half-submerged roll and the scrape of talons on the hard surface of the decoy could have been clearly heard much farther away than my 40 feet. Now, standing in six inches of water and just downstream from the tacking decoy, the eagle gave a sudden wing flap, reached out and grasped the decoy's head with its right foot, and both eagle and decoy were in the air.

Hurriedly, I raised up in the blind as the eagle took wing but I stood motionless when