

GENERAL NOTES

Swallow-tailed Kite and snake: an unusual encounter.—On the morning of 10 May 1964, Mr. Bailey Darley, who operates the fishing camp at the South Altamaha River, just off U.S. Highway 17, in McIntosh County, Georgia, saw a bird, unfamiliar to him, alight on the road nearby. The bird was fluttering one wing. He found that the bird had a small snake wrapped around the wing. With the aid of a stick he was able to get bird and snake into a wire poultry cage. He then reached in with a stick and got under the snake, which released its hold. Through Mr. George Geiger of the Georgia Fish and Game Department the word was passed on to Mr. Neil Hotchkiss, of the Patuxent Research Center, and he and Mr. Walter A. Harmer went over that day, and identified the bird as a Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) and the snake as the keeled green snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*).

The following day, Mr. Brooke Meanley, also of the Patuxent Research Center, and I saw the bird and the reptile, and photographed the bird. It was an adult, in excellent plumage other than a minor amount of feather damage from the incident. Mr. Darley released the bird and the snake that same day. When released the kite flew toward the top of a nearby cypress, but was chased by two Mockingbirds and flew on off with no obvious damage.

Recent records of this kite in coastal Georgia are very few. Mr. Harmer, who is a biologist with the Georgia State Board of Health, has spent many years in the Altamaha River Delta and has never seen the species there before.

It is supposed that when the kite captured the snake in its claws, it wound around the wing enough to hamper flight. The bird was quite docile in captivity and accepted and ate a few small minnows offered to it on a straw or wire.—IVAN R. TOMKINS, 1231 East 50th St., Savannah, Georgia, 21 July 1964.

Piping Plover's nest containing eight eggs.—On 20 May 1964, we found a Piping Plover's (*Charadrius melodus*) nest containing eight eggs at Long Point, Norfolk County, Ontario (42°32'N, 80°07'W). An adult Piping Plover was seen incubating the eggs and appeared to be having some difficulty in covering them all. On 22 May the nest contained only seven eggs and by 27 May all had gone. It was suspected that Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) were responsible for the loss of the eggs, as indicated by footprints around the nest.

Bent (1929. *U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull.*, 146:239) says "four eggs are the almost invariable rule with the Piping Plover; rarely only three are laid in second nests, and I have found one with five." Of 526 nests examined by Wilcox (1959. *Auk*, 76:129-152) on Long Island, New York, none contained more than four eggs; 448 contained 4 eggs, 70 contained 3 eggs, and 8 contained 2 eggs. Although it is probable that two females were responsible for the eight-egg clutch, no definite proof of this was obtained.—D. J. T. HUSSELL, 1916 Cambridge Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan, AND J. K. WOODFORD, 76 Glentworth Road, Willowdale, Ontario, (*Contribution of the Long Point Bird Observatory*), 8 September 1964.

The status of the Ruff in North America.—In this note I present evidence suggesting that the Ruff (*Philamachus pugnax*) may be breeding in North America. The Ruff is by far the commonest of the palaeartic shorebirds that occur in North

TABLE 1
OCCURRENCES OF THE RUFF IN EASTERN NORTH AMERICA, 1953-63

	Dates															
	March		April			May		June		July		August		September		Octo-ber
	15-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	November		
Nova Scotia, Maine				1					3		1	1				
Ontario				1	1	2			5	1						
Mass., Rhode Is., New Hampshire			2	3	2			1	3	1	1	3			2	
New York, Pennsylvania		2	1	8	2	1		2	5	5	3	1	2		1	
New Jersey, Delaware		1	1	5				4	1	3	4				1	
Maryland, N. Carolina, Washington, D.C.	2							1	2				1			
Totals	2	3	4	18	5	3	0	8	19	10	9	5	3		4	

America. In 1963 there were thirty reports of this species in *Audubon Field Notes*. Its current status in eastern North America is that of a scarce, but regular, spring and fall transient. The lack of records from Florida, where shorebird concentrations are well checked, and the records from the Antilles (Bond, 1961. "Birds of the West Indies") suggest an overwater flight from and to South America with a landfall and departure in the general region of Cape Hatteras. The dated records of occurrence, taken from the last 10 years of *Audubon Field Notes*, are given in Table 1. The pattern of dates is that of a typical shorebird that winters in South America and breeds in the North. The question is, does the Ruff merely migrate with other shorebirds or does it breed in the North?

The route of entry from the Old World is of some importance in this discussion. Nisbet (1959. *Brit. Birds*, 52:205) and Eisenmann (1960. *ibid.*, 53:136) have both argued a strong and convincing case for a tropical rather than a North Atlantic crossing. The basis of the argument is as follows:

(1.) If the crossing were via the North Atlantic one would expect that the species breeding in Iceland, Redshank (*T. totanus*) and Black-tailed Godwit (*L. limosa*), and other northern breeders would occur more frequently in North America than the Ruff, which is not especially common in northwestern Europe.

(2.) The Ruff is one of the commonest wintering shorebirds in West Africa.

(3.) The winds in the tropical Atlantic are generally favorable whereas those in the North Atlantic are generally unfavorable.

If we accept this theory, two possibilities exist: either the American population of the Ruff is frequently restocked via the tropical Atlantic crossing, or else the stock is maintained by breeding in North America. There are two pieces of evidence to support the latter. First it can be seen from Table 1 that there are more fall occurrences than spring. The reverse would be expected if the stock came solely from fall or wintering crossing of the tropical Atlantic. In Europe, the Pectoral Sandpiper (*Erolia melanotos*) occurs annually in the fall but few survive to reappear in the spring (Nisbet, loc. cit.). Second, there are a few records of immatures in the fall; these could only occur from breeding in the north or by the unlikely North Atlantic crossing. There are only a few recent specimens of fall birds in the major collections, and none of these are immatures. Two records of immatures have been reported in *Audubon Field Notes*: East Hampton, Long Island on 16 August 1955 (Shephard fide Nichols) and Chincoteague, Virginia, 19 July 1963 (Dyke and Scheider). On 9 July 1964, I saw an immature at Onondaga Lake, New York. Careful checking of fall birds to determine the number of immatures would add considerably to our knowledge of the status of this species.

The author is grateful to Dr. R. F. Andrlle, Mr. Aaron Bagg, Mr. John Bull, Dr. T. Cade, Dr. F. Scheider, and Dr. Walter Spofford for information and advice in the preparation of this note.—DAVID B. PEAKALL, *Upstate Medical Center, 766 Irving Avenue, Syracuse, New York, 16 October 1964.*

Common Crows catching European chafers on the wing.—At 8:00 PM on 30 June 1964, I noticed a large flock (250–300 birds) of Common Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) perching in and flying from a dead American elm (*Ulmus americanus*) which overlooked a treeless plot of the Mount Hope Cemetery in Rochester, New York. The flights of single birds to and from the tree seemed at first to be the normal activity of pre-roosting crows, but closer scrutiny revealed these crows to be in aerial pursuit of countless swarming brown insects. These were later identified by Dr. Edward Boardman, of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, as European chafers (*Amphimallon majalis* Raz.)

The adult chafers are flying beetles which swarm about foliage at dusk, humming like bees. The crows, in spite of their large size, were very dexterous in catching the chafers on the wing. The birds flew from the base perch, pursued the quarry, caught it while hovering, and returned to the perch, all with the finesse of a flycatcher.

The European chafer, a beetle of the family Scarabaeidae, was introduced into this country about 25 years ago. It is a close relative of many native species of "June Bug," as well as the Japanese beetle, Oriental beetle, and Asiatic garden beetle. The larval stage of the chafer is injurious to the roots of most grasses.

Acknowledgment.—I am most grateful to Dr. Foster Gambrell of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, N.Y. for his assistance in supplying information about the European chafer.—DWIGHT R. CHAMBERLAIN, *School of Forestry and Wildlife, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia, 22 August 1964.*

An observation of heavy predation by Pearly-eyed Thrasher.—On numerous occasions I have seen Pearly-eyed Thrashers (*Margarops fuscatus*) eating small birds and house mice (*Mus musculus*), and occasionally have seen them feeding upon rats (*Rattus*). The prey is usually impaled on a wire or thorn and at times is even lodged in a crotch