

Okatibbee Creek Audubon Society

June 2003

Inside This Newsletter...

My Eastern Phoebe—A Follow-Up
Bird Sightings
Louisiana Trivia
A Little Walk on the Prairie

Read OCAS' newsletter online at

<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/gl1800/ocas.html>

**You know you are in MISSISSIPPI in THE SUMMER when
the birds have to use potholders to pull worms out of the
ground.**

--thanks, Lomax

NOTICE!! Instead of having our meeting on the second Monday of the month, in June we will meet the **THIRD** Monday evening. Same time—7:00. Same place—Trinity Presbyterian.

June 16th Program: What **ARE** those strange little things you see crawling around? A presentation of live and specimen insects, by Lauren and Larry Thead.

My Eastern Phoebe—A Follow-Up

By Howard Malone

Those of you who attended the last meeting remember my telling of the progress of the Eastern Phoebe brood I had described in last month's newsletter. The nest was "full of little Phoebes, too many to count, very still, with their eyes closed, presumably a reaction to my presence."

Last Friday (16 May) I took a friend over to see the little ones and check on their progress toward maturity. I was explaining the construction details of

the nest to my friend as we opened the door to the porch and pointed to the little droplets of mud on the floor. "OH NO!!" I cried, recognizing the half feathered skeleton lying on the floor. "Something bad has happened. One must have fallen out of the nest." It was worse than that. When I mounted the stepladder and looked into the nest, there were two more decayed bodies, resulting in a total loss of the brood.

In retrospect, I now remember not seeing the parent(s) as I worked for an extended time in the area. In fact, I had carried a lawn chair and binos close enough to observe the feeding trips of the parents, but was out-waited, I thought, when none appeared. Surely the nest was not abandoned, for I had not ventured too close in my observations, except for two quick looks, one in which the parent left the nest but stayed nearby on the porch. Does anyone have knowledge or experience of birds abandoning young because of the presence of humans? I surely would not want to be responsible for the death of a brood because of my simple curiosity. I guess this is an example of the difficulties our feathered friends face in maintaining the species.

To bring refreshments to the June 16, 2003,
meeting: Van and Debbie McWhorter
*Many thanks to Joe and Robin Johnson for
last meeting's refreshments.*

If you're reading this online or by e-mail and know of someone who'd like to get the newsletter electronically to save postage.

sthead@mississippi.net

June 20-22nd Audubon Mississippi Chapter Gathering---Plan to attend an exciting viewing and natural history weekend on the Mississippi Coast focused on two important birds and one big ol' fish---Mississippi natives Swallow-tailed Kites, Least Terns and Gulf Sturgeon. Put these dates on your calendar. You won't want to miss it. The weekend starts on Friday evening at Moss Point with a social and buffet and featuring the Natural History and Radio Tracking of Swallow-tailed Kites. Other ornithologists and naturalists programs and field trips carry on Saturday and Sunday with bird and boat tours. Friday dinner is provided by MS Audubon, Boat Trip \$15, Saturday Banquet \$10. Register by June 16th. Contact Anna Morrison 662-252-1155 or go to website www.msaudubon.com for more information.

Bird Sightings

By **Ed Brown**, all the following:

4/19 American Kestrel. Red-cockaded woodpecker colony. Tallahala WMA.

4/20 American Woodcock with 4 young. Tallahala WMA.

4/20 Swallow-tail Kite. Bogue Homa Lake. Highway #15 south of Laurel just off I-59.

5/8 Cedar Waxwings. Bay Springs

5/10 Hooded Warbler. Kentucky Warbler. Louin.

5/22 Three Ospreys on Paulette Road around a catfish pond in Noxubee County.

5/19 Kentucky Warbler near my house in Louin

5/23 Hooded Warbler

By **Van McWhorter**, all the following:

5/28 2 Mature Bald Eagles. Pine tree on Big Causeway, Okatibbee Lake.

5/31 2 Spotted Sandpipers. Twiltley Branch Park, Okatibbee Lake.

5/31 2 Least Sandpipers. Twiltley Branch Park, Okatibbee Lake.

5/31 1 Cooper's Hawk. Okatibbee Lake.

By **Lauren Thead**, all the following:

5/5 Common Nighthawk. Magnolia Drive, Macon, MS.

5/9 Mississippi Kite. East Columbus, MS.

5/10 Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge.

5/13 Northern Bobwhite, American Redstart. Wildcat Road, Collinsville, MS.

5/31 Mississippi Kite, Prairie Warbler. Bienville National Forest, Harrell Prairie, Scott County, MS.

By **Erin Thead**: 5/15 One very impressive, 12-foot-long alligator at Goose Overlook, NNWR, sunning itself as a Snowy Egret and a Little Blue Heron walked past casually and unconcernedly, seemingly unaware that they were the potential buffet offering.

Remember, articles, bird sightings and items of interest are requested for the newsletter!

Some Louisiana Trivia....

Louisiana's 6.5 million acres of wetlands are the greatest in the nation.

The oldest City in the Louisiana Purchase Territory is Natchitoches, founded in 1714.

Baton Rouge was the site of the only American Revolution battle outside the 13 colonies.

Louisiana is the No. 1 producer of crawfish, alligators and shallots in the nation.

Louisiana produces 24 percent of the nation's salt, the most in the country.

The International Joke Telling Contest is held annually in Opelousas.

--Courtesy of Van McWhorter and Ray Riggs

A Little Walk on the Prairie

By Lauren Thead

It was very hot and uncomfortable on May 31. Many people would have been indoors with their air conditioners blowing on a day like this. But Nancy Donald and I were perfectly happy to be spending our time tramping through the knee-high mixture of grasses, flowers, and blackberry brambles on Harrell Prairie in Bienville National Forest.

The trip had been long; as Nancy put it, once you *FOUND* the prairie, it was easy to find! We spent a lot of time going down the wrong roads, looking for a gate that should have been opened, according to what we had heard from other people. Finally, we found the place—Bienville National Forest. The gate was very obvious (we had mistakenly driven past it several minutes earlier) and it *WAS* open, so we went down the road, bordered by dense pine forest. Once the pine forest began to give way to small trees and grasses, we knew we were near the prairie.

Nancy and I soon found a nice place to get out and walk. There were all kinds of beautiful wildflowers as far as we could see. Purple coneflowers, black-eyed Susans, and blue-eyed grass were there, as well as many others we did not recognize. These flowers attracted dog-faced butterflies, swallowtails of several types and skippers that we enjoyed watching as they fluttered from plant to plant. We flushed lots of huge grasshoppers and heard a Northern Bobwhite calling many yards away from us. The high-pitched, buzzy cricket-like song of a Prairie Warbler could be heard, and we soon saw the songster perched in a flowering bush. This beautiful yellow-, black- and olive-colored warbler is a local nesting bird in young woodlands and shrubby areas. The warbler was difficult to keep up with as it moved through the thick, thorny vegetation that was growing in a moist area of the prairie; and, since it was getting harder to hear the song over the wind, we decided to watch for other birds instead.

Prairie
Warbler



A few Yellow-breasted Chats could be heard singing from different locations on the prairie. We were having little luck seeing them until suddenly one male flew out of the thicket and began flapping his wings jerkily and singing loudly while in midair. He then dropped down into a nearby bush. Nancy and I were excited to have observed this. I've only seen this fascinating display flight three or four times.

Other birds that were singing on the prairie were Common Yellowthroats, White-eyed Vireos, and Carolina Wrens. We tracked down and observed many of these, before noting about ten Turkey Vultures soaring overhead. The winds must have been just right for these birds' flight. We didn't smell anything that they could've been attracted to; and besides that, with the way they were flying leisurely instead of circling tightly over one spot, they almost seemed to be sightseeing. Soon I spotted a much smaller bird swooping through the sky near the vultures. I looked through my binoculars and saw the pointed wings, long tail and pale head of this Mississippi Kite. We watched its graceful flight for a few minutes until it flew higher and out of sight.

Several sharp *chip* notes alerted us to the presence of Blue Grosbeaks. Two males chased each other furiously through the trees, each flapping noisily and rustling vegetation in his hurry to prove that he was the better of the two. One finally got away and began singing his song of throaty, hurried warbling phrases while in full sunlight. We admired the plumage of the grosbeak and also that of an Indigo Bunting that sang from the top of a small tree.

Of course, not everything was alive and thriving. There were several dead snags standing out above the colorful flowers and grasses. These trees had been killed by the alkaline soil, but this is a natural process that provides perches for songbirds claiming their territories and good places for several species of woodpeckers, which we also saw that day.

It was time for us to be heading back home, so Nancy snapped a few photographs before we turned around and drove out of the national forest, pleased with our enjoyable day here. The Harrell Prairie, with its great variety of wildlife, is a very interesting place to be. If you make a trip there, you will very likely have a great time birding and/or butterfly-watching and will certainly be filled with a greater respect for this wild, beautiful stretch of natural prairie.

OCAS OFFICERS

R.L. Richardson...President

Howard Malone...Treasurer

Brant Cunningham...Program Chairperson

Van McWhorter...Conservation Chairperson

Joe McGee...Field Trip Chairperson

Ruth Ann Rosamond..Refreshments Coordinator

Lauren & Sheila Thead....Newsletter

Note from Rich Richardson: Meetings are held at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Meridian. Trinity is located at 4223 Poplar Springs Drive. Please use the **SOUTH** driveway on the church property (the one nearer downtown Meridian) and proceed around through the parking lot to the back, where you may enter the building through the double doors.

June 16, 2003

--And from Sheila:

To all my Audubon friends: Please note that I discontinued my previous phone number of 601-986-2189 and now have a regular number of 662-726-9676. If this is long-distance to you, you may call me anytime at no charge to you or to me at 938-8216. This is a local call from areas included in the Meridian phone book. If you're calling from places other than that—i.e.,

where it would be long-distance for you to have called me at Collinsville—
then it will also be long-distance to call that other number, so add the 1+601
to it. My e-mail address stays the same. Thanks! --Sheila

Content © OCAS 2003