

NOTES

A fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird specimen from Pinellas County.—First evidences of breeding in Florida by the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) were in 1956 and 1957 near Pensacola (Sprunt 1963, Weston 1965). Since then the species has become a common breeder throughout northern Florida and now is spreading rapidly southward in the peninsula. Here we report first evidence of breeding in Pinellas County, halfway down Florida peninsula, and describe Tampa Bay area population increases of the species during recent summers.

A young fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird was brought to the Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary in Pinellas County on 2 June 1985. It died the same day. Precise locality data were not kept, but little doubt exists the bird was obtained locally. Rarely are birds brought to the sanctuary from outside the county, and for these more precise locality data are kept. The specimen, a female (ovary 3.5 X 3mm, not granular), weighed only 17.5 grams. It is preserved as a study skin (GEW 5736) at the University of South Florida. The primaries and rectrices have remnants of sheaths and the tail (56.5 mm total length) is about 10 mm shorter than average for adult females. Cowbirds typically weigh about 30 grams at fledging (Mayfield 1960). The incomplete feather growth and light weight support a local origin for the bird.

The Nesting Season reports in *American Birds* and its predecessor *Audubon Field Notes* provide a good account of the expansion of the Brown-headed Cowbird's breeding range in Florida. Several specimens in the Florida State University bird collections provide documentation of the event. The species spread through the panhandle, crossing the Apalachicola River around 1960 (Stevenson 1959, 1960). Cowbirds were breeding commonly in the Tallahassee region by 1965, the year the Jacksonville area had its first June record (Ogden 1965). FSU specimens 6880g-h document breeding at Alligator Point, Franklin Co. in June 1967; and FSU 6880j, a specimen of a fledgling that was being fed by a Parula Warbler (*Parula americana*), demonstrates breeding in Jackson Co. in May 1968. By 1980 fledglings were reported throughout northern Florida from Pensacola to Jacksonville and south in the peninsula to Gainesville (Edscom 1980). In the Tallahassee Region summering cowbirds became common along the coast a few years earlier than inland, and a similar pattern is apparent for northeast Florida.

Intensive studies of breeding land birds in lower Pinellas County during the early 1960s produced no records of cowbirds (Woolfenden and Rohwer 1969). A county-wide summer bird count has taken place from 1970 through 1985. Only one Brown-headed Cowbird was recorded before 1981, but the species has been recorded on four of the five counts since 1981, with a maximum of six individuals reported in 1985. All records are coastal (*vide* Dave Goodwin). Lyn Atherton censused land birds in and near Ft. DeSoto County Park, at the southern tip of Pinellas County, in 1984-85, and generously shared her records of cowbirds. In 1984 she recorded cowbirds in the park 6 days in April (1-6 birds per day), 9 days in May (1-7 birds), and once in June. On 23 May she observed a pair copulating, and on 1 September two streak-breasted juveniles. In 1985 she observed cowbirds 6 days in April (1-9 birds) and 5 days in May (2-5 birds). Martha Vaughan and W. Hoffman observed an adult male at Clearwater Christian College 4 July, and Brooks Atherton found a flock of about 30 near the Pinellas County Resource Recovery Plant in mid-July.

The Brown-headed Cowbird is now beginning to appear in summer in adjacent Hillsborough County. A U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding-Bird Survey conducted in the western part of the county since 1966 recorded no cowbirds until 1985 when a displaying male was seen on 13 June near Odessa by G. Woolfenden and Manuel Lopez. The Tampa Summer Bird Count, which follows the rules of a Christmas Bird Count, has been conducted

since 1971. Cowbirds have been recorded two years only, 1983 and 1984, with a maximum of 3 individuals (*vide* William D. Courser). Finally, Jack Dozier observed a female cowbird in an industrial park in northwest Tampa, 12 July.

As a nest parasite, the Brown-headed Cowbird lays its eggs in the nests of other species of birds. Unfortunately, the host for the Pinellas County cowbird specimen is unknown, but eight species breed locally that are common hosts in southeastern United States (Friedmann 1929, Friedmann et al. 1977, Nolan 1978): Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*), White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*), Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*), Prairie Warbler (*D. discolor*), Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), and Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*). Henry M. Stevenson reports to us the record of a White-eyed Vireo nest with one cowbird egg and three vireo eggs collected in Okaloosa Co., in June 1963. Certainly cowbirds will continue to increase and spread south in the peninsula. We urge field observers to search appropriate nests for eggs and young.

Cowbirds have contributed to population declines in Kirtland's Warblers (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) (Mayfield 1960) and perhaps Black-capped Vireos (*Vireo atricapillus*) (Williams 1983). Both are species with restricted ranges. Three species with restricted ranges in peninsular Florida soon may suffer similar fates, the Black-whiskered Vireo (*Vireo altiloquus*), and the Florida races of the Prairie Warbler (*D. discolor paludicola*) and Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum floridanus*).

Florida may become the meeting place for three parasitic cowbird species! The Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*), which first was recorded in Florida in 1962 (Sprunt 1963), now is an annual visitor to the Tampa Bay area, and an irregular visitor south even to the Florida Keys. The Shiny Cowbird (*M. bonariensis*), which has been spreading rapidly through the Greater Antilles (Post and Wiley 1977, Wiley 1985), has just reached Florida. At this writing the first individual found in North America is frequenting a feeder in the Keys. Host preferences in Florida for these two species likely would be similar to those of the Brown-headed Cowbird, although the Shiny Cowbird's penchant for parasitizing *Agelaius* blackbirds in the Caribbean (Wiley 1985) suggests the Red-winged Blackbird (*A. phoeniceus*) as a potential target. We acknowledge with pleasure the assistance of Henry Stevenson in preparing this note.

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Longevity of a captive Blue Jay.—Clapp et al. (1983, J. Field Ornithol. 54: 133) listed the Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) longevity record as 18 years-4 months for a recovered banded bird. Here I report on the longevity of a captive Blue Jay.

The nestling Blue Jay was found in Pitman, New Jersey in June 1958. Initially, the nestling was hand fed a mash diet made from milk, oatmeal, corn meal, bran, cut raisins, canned meat dog food, and crushed egg shells. When the jay could feed itself, it also was supplied with water, garden dirt, commercial bird seed and peanuts. During her early years, she occasionally laid infertile eggs. In January 1974 I brought the jay to Florida. As the jay advanced in age, she became blind and crippled and required hand feeding during the last year of her life. She died on 14 September 1984 at the age of 26 years-3 months.

I thank J. A. Rodgers, Jr. and D. S. Maehr for assistance in writing this note.—**Marion G. Coles**, 1809 El Ranch Dr., Sun City Center, Florida 33570.

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A Great Egret feeding on bread.—During five winter/spring visits to central Florida since 1971 I was able to study the birds on Lake Eola, Orange County very many times. The birds were tame and closely associated with visitors. Food of various kinds was strewn both to land and water birds, the main ingredients being peanuts and bread material. In April 1981, I made the unusual observation of Pied-billed Grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*) taking bread from the surface of the lake in competition with other aquatic birds (King 1985, Fla. Field Nat. 13: 9). More recently, on the 16th January 1984, I observed a Great Egret (*Egretta alba*) at Lake Eola feeding along the water's edge. As it came to a small clump of reeds it bent forward to dip its head and long neck into the base of these and surprisingly, on three occasions, came out with small pieces of bread in the tip of its bill. Each time the food was held in this way; and, with neck stretched upward, it remained motionless for some fifteen seconds. Then, with a rapid head jerking movement the bread was swallowed.

I have not encountered the behavior in either Pied-billed Grebes or Great Egrets at Lake Eola, nor in any of the Ardeidae. Nevertheless, it may be of great interest for additional studies to be made where such associations exist, such as on similar lakes in Orange County and elsewhere.—**Bernard King** Gull Cry 9 Park Road, Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall, England.

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