

SUMMER OBSERVATIONS OF BIRDS IN DESOTO NATIONAL FOREST, MISSISSIPPI

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The breeding distributions of many species within Mississippi are unclear. This is especially true in areas where a species becomes uncommon or rare. Without intensive effort, these less abundant birds can easily be overlooked. Yet, areas where a species is rare are of particular interest because they may define the edge of that species' breeding range.

From late April through June 1994, I was involved in a project describing habitat use of birds in DeSoto National Forest. As part of this effort, three observers (myself, Mike Guilfoyle, and Fred Amidon) conducted over 1200 point counts, mostly within the Black Creek Ranger District. This relatively intensive effort yielded detections of several species not previously reported as breeding within DeSoto National Forest. The purpose of this report is to describe these observations from Greene, Forrest, Perry, and Stone counties, Mississippi. Because our records merely indicate the presence of these species, I hope this report stimulates further effort to confirm breeding in DeSoto National Forest.

The observations detailed here were made both while conducting point counts and while traveling from point to point. For each of the records, observers confirmed identification visually. I consider a species to be rare if it is not listed as occurring during summer in "*Birding Check List for the DeSoto National Forest*" (Anonymous, undated).

Species Accounts

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*). In southern Mississippi, American Redstarts appear to be associated with bottomlands along large rivers. For example, Toups and Jackson (1987) list several records of this species from along the Pearl River near the coast. Also, records exist of singing males and a female with dependent young along the Pascagoula River (Jackson 1984, Toups and Jackson 1987). In DeSoto National Forest, the only such habitat is found in the Leaf River Wilderness Area. Mike Guilfoyle observed two singing males there on 5 June (Table 1). I observed another singing male along the Leaf River just outside of the national forest on 18 June (about 9.6 km SE of Hattiesburg; Table 1), so it may be that American Redstarts occur throughout the Leaf River bottomlands.

Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorus*). Toups and Jackson (1987) list one breeding season record of Worm-eating Warbler in the coastal counties. We observed this species on six occasions during May and June. In each case, the birds occurred on sites with steep hillsides covered in deciduous trees. There the ground was covered by a thick layer of leaf litter rather than pine straw. These conditions characterize the nesting habitat of Worm-eating Warblers throughout their range (Griscom and Sprunt 1979, DeGraaf and Rappole 1995, Harrison 1984).

On 15 and 20 June, we observed two Worm-eating Warblers together, apparently as a pair. During the 20 June observation, both birds remained within 7 m of me chipping constantly throughout a 10-minute count. Such behavior is consistent with individuals that have a nest or recently-fledged young nearby.

Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*). We observed Louisiana Waterthrushes at four sites from late April through June (Table 1). These birds were along small to intermediate size streams ranging from 3-8 m in width. Along smaller and larger streams (e.g. Black Creek), we did not find this species. We observed Louisiana Waterthrushes along the following streams in the area: Hickory Flat Branch, Beaverdam Creek, Cypress Creek, Garraway Creek, and Milky Creek.

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*). Toups and Jackson (1987) report several records of Chipping Sparrows in DeSoto National Forest in late May 1982. We observed this species twice, once in early May and again in mid-June (Table 1). The May observation was of a singing male at the Frambert Seed Orchard. At this site,

large pines grow in well-spaced rows adjacent to open meadow. Because the entire site is regularly mowed, the ground cover is grass throughout. Such habitat is particularly well suited for Chipping Sparrows (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

Table 1. Observations, during April-June 1994, of birds previously considered rare or unusual in the vicinity of the Black Creek Ranger District, DeSoto National Forest, Mississippi. All observations are of a single bird unless indicated otherwise within the text.

Species	Date	County	Township/Range/Section	Observer ^a
American Redstart	5 Jun.	Greene	T1N, R8W, Sec. 34	MG
	18 Jun.	Forrest	T4N, R12W, Sec. 32	DC
Worm-eating Warbler	12 May	Perry	T2N, R9W, Sec. 34	MG
	15 May	Perry	T1S, R11W, Sec. 12	DC
	9 Jun.	Perry	T3N, R11W, Sec. 36	DC
	15 Jun.	Perry	T1N, R9W, Sec. 31	MG
	17 Jun.	Perry	T2N, R10W, Sec. 2	DC
	20 Jun.	Perry	T3N, R11W, Sec. 21	DC
Louisiana Waterthrush	29 Apr.	Perry	T1N, R10W, Sec. 36	DC
	15 May	Perry	T1S, R11W, Sec. 12	DC
	1 Jun.	Perry	T1N, R10W, Sec. 8	DC
	21 Jun.	Perry	T3N, R11W, Sec. 20	DC
	27 Jun.	Perry	T3N, R11W, Sec. 36	DC
Chipping Sparrow	8 May	Stone	T2S, R10W, Sec. 28	MG
	17 Jun.	Perry	T 1N, R10W, Sec. 27	DC

^a MG = Mike Guilfoyle; DC = David Cimprich.

Literature Cited

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