

McGraw, Katherine A., Melford R. Smith, Wm. D. Burke and Gordon Gunter. 1973. Mass migration of blue jays along offshore Mississippi and Louisiana islands. The Mississippi Kite, 3: 2-3.

Stevenson, Henry M. . Migration of the blue jay in the southeastern United States. The Florida Field Naturalist, Volume 1, Number 1, pp. 9-13.

Toenes, Elisabeth R. 1973. Communications: Letters to the editor, p. 130, American Birds, February 1973.

Wass, Marvin L. 1974. Personal letter dated May 3, 1974.

The Yellow-headed Blackbird in Mississippi

By Jerome A. Jackson
Department of Zoology
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, Ms. 39762

On 26 March 1973 I collected an immature male Yellow-headed Blackbird (Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus) on the south farm of Mississippi State University in Oktobbeha County. The bird was prepared as a study skin and is catalogued as M.S.U. skin number 699. It was moderately fat, had an incompletely ossified skull, and weighed 86.0 grams. This is the first specimen record of the Yellow-headed Blackbird for Mississippi, although the species was observed in 1965 at Moss Point in Jackson County. In a letter to Mr. B. E. Gandy dated 8 Sept. 1965, Alice Tait reported an immature male Yellow-headed Blackbird had visited a feeding station on the ground in her back yard on 9, 10, 24, 25, and 26 April 1965. Apparently the same bird was seen daily from 11 to 23 April at another feeder about a quarter of a mile away.

The Yellow-headed Blackbird is characteristically a bird of the Great Plains and parts of the western

U.S. It normally winters in Mexico and parts of the southwestern U.S. Lowery (1960) reports that: "The Yellow-headed Blackbird is a very rare winter visitor and a rare spring transient for which there are still less than a dozen definite records in Louisiana." Nevertheless, Bent (1958) cites records of this species from several eastern states, including many along the Atlantic coast.

Strong west winds for over a week preceding the vagrant appearance of the bird in Oktibbeha County probably were an important influence on its coming here. Williamson (1955) has referred to the wind as being "the migrant bird's greatest enemy". The fact that the two Mississippi records of this species and the Red Crossbill (Loxia curvirostra) (Jackson, 1973) were of first year birds is probably not coincidental. Immature birds of many species are known to wander more than adults, a fact that may be due to the greater familiarity the adults have with migration routes and wintering grounds.

Mississippians should be on the lookout for the Yellow-headed Blackbird during spring and fall migration. These birds are likely to be seen mixed in with other blackbird species foraging in open pastures and fields of lespedeza or grain. The adult males are easy to spot with their bright yellow head and white wing patches, but the females and immature birds are less conspicuous, having only a yellow bib and lacking the white in the wings.

Literature Cited

- Bent, A. C. 1958. Life histories of North American blackbirds, orioles, tanagers, and allies. Bull. U.S. Nat. Mus. no. 211.
- Jackson, J. A. 1973. First record of the Red Crossbill in Mississippi. Mississippi Kite, 3(1):3-4.
- Lowery, G. H. 1960. Louisiana Birds. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge.
- Williamson, K. 1955. Migrational drift. Acta XI Congr. Interntl. Ornith., 1954, pp. 179-186.