

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

Extension of the Known Breeding Range of the Eastern PhoebeIn Mississippi

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While the Eastern Phoebe is a common winter resident throughout Mississippi, it was previously known to breed only in Tishomingo County (Coffey, Migrant 14:70-72, 1943; Turcotte, M.O.S. Newsletter, 2(2):1, 1957). We report here an extension of the breeding range of this species to as far south as Oktibbeha County.

On 17 July 1974 while examining Barn Swallow (Hirundo rustica) nests under a bridge just north of Starkville, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, Robert Howell and Charles Watson discovered a nest of an Eastern Phoebe (Sayornis phoebe). Jackson and Howell later collected the nest and it is presently in the ornithological collection at Mississippi State University. The nest was attached to a bolt and was approximately 6 inches from the floor of the bridge and 11 feet above a drainage ditch. The nest is old and partly deteriorated and there is no way to determine when the nest was constructed, but, judging from its condition, it was probably not built that year. No phoebes were seen in the area on either visit. The bridge was well-shaded by trees on both sides.

On 17 June 1975, Darden and Howell discovered a phoebe nest containing young under a bridge approximately 5 miles north of Starkville in Oktibbeha County. The bridge had a metal grate floor so that gravel, dirt, and water could readily fall through. To the south of the bridge was a second growth bottomland woods, to the north a few small trees and a partially flooded pasture. The bridge was near Trim Cane Creek and had standing floodwater from the creek under it. The nest was on an I-beam in a corner so that it was partially sheltered, though still visible from above. We visited the nest site again in July and found it empty, but intact. It appeared to have been successful. This nest was also collected and is in the collection at Mississippi State.

On 12 July 1975 Jackson and Werschkul checked under bridges and in cement box culverts along Mississippi highway 41 from Pontotoc to the junction of highway 41 with the Natchez Trace. From that point the Trace was followed and bridges and culverts were checked to about 12 miles north of Mathiston, Webster County. We found Barn Swallows but not phoebes nesting under bridges along highway 41. Along the Natchez Trace, however, we found 13 phoebe nests at 8 locations, all in Chickasaw County. Most of these nests were old or empty. Two had Barn Swallow nests built over the top of them and one phoebe nest was built over an old Barn Swallow nest. One phoebe nest .4 miles south of the junction of Mississippi 41 with the Natchez Trace had 4 eggs in it. All of the nests were in concrete box culverts or under concrete bridges. Barn Swallow nests were present at all but one location.