

Nesting of the Dickcissel in Hinds County

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On 4 May 1978, following an afternoon thundershower, I visited the John Bell Williams airport near Raymond, Mississippi. Several Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*) were singing in the pastures. One male Dickcissel was singing from the top of a black locust tree which was in a strip of several acres of tall grasses, weeds, briars, and low bushes on the airport property between the paved access road and an adjacent, open pasture. The bird sang persistently from several other perches on nearby locust sprouts.

I returned on 6 May and found the male singing from the same perches. Two other male Dickcissels were singing from a nearby utility wire along the airport boundary and pasture fence. On 7 May I went again to the site with my wife, Annie Cook. We observed one male singing from several perches and located a female carrying nest material to a weed and blackberry clump surrounded by tall fescue grass (Fig. 1). The female gathered nest material from nearby patches of dead broomsedge. She made 5 or 6 trips to the nest site as we watched. Each time she left the nest, the male left his singing perch and chased or followed until she started to gather nest material. He then resumed singing from a nearby perch. He did not follow her to the nest, nor did he assist in gathering nest material.



Figure 1. Nest site (pointer) and nesting habitat of Dickcissels at the Raymond Airport, Hinds County, Mississippi.

On 14 May I examined the nest and photographed the nesting habitat. The nest was a cup of coarse grasses, loosely woven to the supporting vegetation, and lined with finer grass and a little hair. It contained 2 eggs. The nest was built in a clump of dead goldenrod stalks about 30 cm above the ground. The new growth of goldenrod, blackberry canes, and tall grass growing around the clump concealed the nest from view. On 16 May, John Phares and I returned and photographed the nest and 4 eggs (Fig. 2). The nesting pair was observed near the nest.

Charles L. Stockard (1905) recorded finding 14 Dickcissel nests in a Mississippi vetch field. He collected 11 sets of 5 eggs each and 3 sets of 4 eggs between 9 and 23 May 1900. The nesting locality was not specified. B. R. Warriner (1935) recorded a nesting population of 12 Dickcissels in Alcorn County, 3 miles west of Corinth on 20 May 1935. He had also seen them in the area in several prior years. Egg records in the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science collection substantiate nesting in Coahoma, Lafayette, Panola, and Washington counties. Egg record dates extend from 9 May to 19 June. Museum specimen and sight records between 10 May and 20 June further substantiate occurrence of this species during the breeding period in Bolivar, Hinds, Lee, Madison, Sunflower, Warren, and Yazoo counties. June breeding bird surveys conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and cooperators from 1966 through 1976 indicate occurrence and possible breeding in 12 other Mississippi counties. These counties are listed as follows, showing



Figure 2. Dickcissel nest and eggs, Raymond Airport, Hinds County.

the number of years Dickcissels were recorded on each route, number of years each route was run, and the total number of Dickcissels seen or heard on each route: Adams (3,11,4), DeSoto (9,11,37 and 6,11,20), Holmes (6,7,61), Humphreys (8,8,131), Jefferson (3,11,7), Lincoln (1,9,1), Marion (1,11,1), Monroe (5,5,109), Montgomery (1,8,1), Noxubee (5,8,55), Tunica (4,4,269 and 11,11,464), and Webster (2,4,2). Casual breeding is suggested by the above records for the Yazoo Delta and for the Black Prairie belt in northeast Mississippi.

Alfred O. Gross (in Bent 1968) described the Dickcissel as "very erratic in its distribution. Its numbers, even in the center of its nesting range, fluctuate greatly from year to year. A locality may have an abundance of Dickcissels, only to have them disappear in a few years." In western Hinds County, in recent years, I have observed male Dickcissels calling at several different locations during May and early June. On the Interstate-20 interchange at Bolton in 1977, I saw a male calling from a signpost on several occasions. Twice its mate was present in a nearby growth of vetch, weeds, and grasses. I searched the area for a nest but failed to find one. On 14 May 1978, I saw 3 or more singing males at the same interchange and in a nearby cornfield that was growing up in weeds and vetch. Another singing male was seen in an overgrown, weedy area adjoining a ryegrass pasture south of Brownsville. These observations and the above-cited nesting record extend the known nesting range of the Dickcissel to central Hinds County.

Literature Cited

- Bent, A.C. 1968. Life histories of North American cardinals, grosbeaks, buntings, towhees, finches, sparrows, and allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 237.
 Stockard, C. R. 1905. Nesting habits of birds in Mississippi. Auk 22:273.
 Warriner, B. R. 1935. Notes from Corinth, Mississippi. Migrant 6:35.

A Late Nesting of the Carolina Wren in Hinds County

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On 5 August 1978 I discovered a nest of the Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) on a narrow ledge between 2 studs of the garage wall at my home in Jackson, Mississippi. The typical nest contained 3 eggs when found and on 8 August a wren was incubating 4 eggs. On 22 August the nest held 3 newly-hatched young and one egg. That egg hatched on the following day. When I placed a finger in the nest on 4 September, all 4 nestlings flew the width of the garage, or more, and scampered to places of concealment. I know of no later nesting record for this species.