

ON BIRDS OBSERVED IN SUMPTER, LEVY, AND
HILLSBORO' COUNTIES, FLORIDA.

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My purpose in the following pages is to give additional notes on the distribution and habits of certain birds that do not seem to have come commonly under the notice of ornithologists collecting in Florida during the fall, winter, and early spring months. The data which follow were collected during two visits to Florida, and at the several points to be presently indicated. The first of these visits occurred in 1876 and covered a period extending from January 1 to the end of the following March. The observations then made were confined to the interior, the precise location being at Panasofkee Lake in Sumpter County. Here a large region was carefully studied and particularly the bird fauna of this lake,—a small body of water, about eight miles long and four broad in its widest part. Its greatest depth is, so far as ascertained, about fifteen feet, but the general depth is much less, being not more than three or four feet. The general characteristics of the region are those common to many parts of the State,—rolling sandhills wooded with pine, “hummocks,” some of great extent, and wet open grass lands or marshes. These last give rise to certain small streams supplying the lake, which in its turn has a large outlet leading into the Withlacoochee River, forming one of the main branches of that river. The lake is bounded by “saw-grasses” and cypress swamps; the latter are very extensive about the outlet of the lake and along the river above-mentioned.

Late in October, 1879, I again visited Florida, and spent from November 1 until April 5 on the Gulf Coast. The interval from the 1st of November until the 25th of January was passed at a point some three miles north of the mouth of the Withlacoochee River. Here the Gulf is dotted for a distance of three or four miles from the shore with innumerable islands, mostly low and of very limited area. The main land, as it approaches the Gulf, is heavily wooded with pine, interspersed here and there with small hummocks. The pine forests end generally very abruptly in large salt marshes reaching to the Gulf.

Late in January I left this point and went to Clearwater, fifty miles south, a region entirely different from that just described. Here the main land terminates in high bluffs. About two miles from the main land long islands extend parallel to it, forming interior bays like those of New Jersey and at many points along the coast of the States to the southward. These islands are generally narrow, high, and at points heavily wooded. With this brief glance at these three regions the remarks on the birds characterizing them will be more intelligible.

It is not in the scope of the present paper to mention all the species occurring, and it will be only necessary to say that the commoner small land species were met with at each point. It may be well, however, to use as a standard for comparison Mr. Allen's list,* and notice only such species as apparently differ in general distribution or did not come under his observation or that of the gentlemen referred to by him.

In January, 1879, the Long-billed Marsh Wren (*Telmatodytes palustris*) was abundant in the salt marshes at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River.

At Ocala, in the interior, on November 1, 1879, two Tit Larks (*Anthus lodovicianus*) were noticed and the species was common at Clearwater during February.

The Golden-crowned Thrush (*Siurus auricapillus*) I met with once at Clearwater in February and the Water Thrush (*Siurus naevius*) was not uncommon in February in the damp, dark, mangrove islands in the same locality. It seemed peculiar to meet this species on these small islands that were overflowed with salt water each high tide. The Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) was common about Clearwater February 22, and on March 6 I noted a pair breeding in a hollow in a decayed mangrove close to the water. I found also several pairs breeding inland during the same month.

Of the Finches recorded in Mr. Allen's list I did not find either the Snowbird (*Junco hyemalis*), or the Fox-colored Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*). Both the Sharp-tailed and Seaside Finches (*Ammodromus caudacutus* and *A. maritimus*) were found commonly, but though I took many specimens of *A. maritimus* none were in the peculiar plumage (*A. maritimus*

* Mammals and Winter Birds of East Florida, etc. Bull. Mus. Comp. Zoölogy Vol. II, pp. 161-450, April, 1871.

nigrescens) obtained by Mr. Maynard. The Yellow-winged Sparrow (*Coturniculus passerinus*) was common throughout February and March at Clearwater, and on March 25 I obtained a single Henslow's Sparrow (*C. henslowi*) at the same locality. In the same region Bachman's Finch (*Peuceea aestivalis*) was abundant.

Several specimens of Chuck-will's-widow (*Antrostomus carolinensis*) were noted or taken during the month of February at Clearwater.

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) was taken at both Panasofkee Lake and at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River and was noted at Clearwater. It was most common at the second locality but seems a rare bird at all the points indicated. A female taken on January 20, 1880, was incubating. The nest seems to be not uncommonly made in the trunk of the palmetto, from observations made at the mouth of the Withlacoochee where these trees are particularly abundant and large. I noticed an old nest, evidently of this species, that was not more than fifteen feet from the ground.

The Parakeet (*Conurus carolinensis*) is becoming yearly more rare. It was very abundant at Panasofkee Lake, but very few were noted at the mouth of the Withlacoochee, and only a single bird at Clearwater, though it was not uncommon in the interior twelve miles north of the latter locality.

About February 1, 1876, I first noticed the Everglade Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) at Panasofkee Lake, and shortly this species became abundant at this point. Frequently pairs were observed together and the bird was commonly met with in parties of from six to ten. On one occasion I noticed nineteen associated together, fishing in the shallow water of a bay that made off from one side of the lake. Many of the birds were in the brown plumage, though the dark blue plumage was frequently met with. Their food at this point apparently consists of a kind of large fresh-water snail, which is very abundant, and the local name of "Snail Hawk" is particularly applicable to the bird as I have met with it. They fish over the shallow water, reminding one of Gulls in their motions, and having secured a snail by diving they immediately carry it to the nearest available perch, when the animal is dexterously taken from the shell without injury to the latter. At many points where a particularly conven-

ient tree or stub rises out of the saw-grass the ground is literally heaped with the empty shells of these unfortunate snails. The birds were especially numerous throughout the month of March but had not, I think, nested before my departure, March 25, as they were still associated in flocks or companies.

During January and February, 1876, I many times noted individuals of the Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*), but as they were very wary I was unable to obtain specimens. The Swallow-tailed Kite (*Nauclerus furcatus*) I found common at Panasofkee Lake during the last week of February and throughout March. These three species, met with so commonly at the point indicated, I did not even see on the coast, though certain regions visited some ten miles inland seemed admirably adapted for at least the two latter. *R. sociabilis*, it may be well to remark, impresses me as eminently an aquatic species. I found it always in the immediate vicinity of the lake and generally most common about certain bays where the water was shallow and the snails particularly abundant. Although there were extensive marshes along the river, and although at points where it widened out the water was shallow and the snails present (at a point hardly two miles from the lake), this species was never there observed by me hunting over the land at any point, nor even along the river.

The Duck Hawk (*Falco peregrinus*) was a rather common species during the first two months of my stay at Panasofkee Lake and was noted, though not so commonly, in March. The last observation on this species was on March 24, when a pair were seen. As observed here, this Hawk preyed almost exclusively on the Coot (*Fulica americana*) which occurred in enormous flocks on both lake and river.

At all three points I found the White-headed Eagle (*Haliaëtus leucocephalus*) a common bird and this was particularly the case on the coast. A pair at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River began to repair an old nest early in November, 1879, and must have laid early in December, as the young were obtained almost fully fledged the 22d of January. At Clearwater Harbor two sets, one of two and one of three almost fully fledged young, were obtained February 5 and 6. Four Eagle's nests were in sight from the house where I stayed at this place, within the radius of a mile and a half, all of them inhabited. In the immediate neigh-

borhood were at least seven or eight other pairs of Eagles breeding.

Audubon's Caracara (*Polyborus brasiliensis*) was not observed at any of the localities visited.

The Barred Owl (*Strix nebulosa alleni*), which was very abundant at Panasofkee Lake, was rather a rare bird at the points visited on the coast, but the Screech Owl (*Scops asio floridana*), which I did not find in the interior, was abundant at both localities on the Gulf Coast. The specimens obtained are most of them in the gray or mottled plumage, though two are in the red plumage. In size they are like the Acadian Owl (*Nyctale acadica*) as found in New Jersey, a trifle smaller if anything.

The Black-breasted Plover (*Squatarola helvetica*) was very common in November, December, and January at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River, and remained common at Clearwater until late in March. The Golden Plover (*Charadrius virginicus*) was not met with. In January I several times saw the Wilson's Plover (*Aegialitis wilsonia*), but it was not common. On my arrival at Clearwater, 30th January, it was abundant in small flocks of from four to a dozen. They were very unsuspecting and easily taken. My assistant, Mr. James Henry Devereux, procured many nests with eggs of this species on the shores of Old Tampa Bay in April and early May. He says that they breed very abundantly at this point but their eggs and young are so diligently sought after and destroyed by the common hog that very few escape. This is also the case with the Willet (*Totanus semipalmatus*) and other ground-nesting species.

Both the Semipalmated and Piping Plovers (*Aegialitis semipalmata* and *A. meloda*), were met with at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River in December and January; the former very abundantly and the latter rarely. The former was also common at Clearwater in February. The Oystercatcher (*Hæmatopus palliatus*) was not uncommon during my stay at the mouth of the river, but was rather more numerous during late December and January. It was common at Clearwater, where Mr. Devereux obtained a set of eggs. At all points where it was met with it was very shy. During November, December, and January, the Turnstone (*Strepsilas interpres*) was an abundant bird at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River, and it was also common at Clearwater during the first part of February.

The Red-breasted Snipe (*Macrorhamphus griseus*) was a common bird during my stay on the Gulf Coast and was also met with at Panasofkee Lake, though not commonly. At this latter place most of the individuals obtained were the variety *scolopaceus*, but on the Gulf the commoner form (variety *griseus*) obtained, almost to the exclusion of the other. A curious habit of this species was noted at the mouth of the Withlacoochee, where I saw the birds alight in very deep water and swim about for considerable time. This occurred in every instance after a flock had been fired at, and I thought at first that the birds had been wounded, but after observing the occurrence a number of times and on watching the birds while in the water I concluded that such was not the case. Those I noted were generally solitary individuals, but twice I saw three and once four alight in the water, swim lightly and gracefully about, and when disturbed rise easily and fly away. These observations were all made at one point. This was an oyster reef at some distance from any other land. At low tide it was bare and would become covered at this time with hosts of *Grallæ*. A single point remained half-submerged at high water and this was covered with this species and *Strepsilas interpres*. The area thus crowded by birds was but a few square yards and the birds on it at high water were generally asleep, as was plainly to be seen with a field glass. I think the birds simply alighted in the water to wait till such a time as the disturbing element would allow of their returning to this favorite resting point.

The Great Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*) and the Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius longirostris*) were common on the Gulf Coast at both points visited, and I was told by trustworthy hunters that both species remained the year round, though very much more abundant in winter. Other species of *Numenius* I did not meet with. It seems hardly necessary to record the abundance of the Willet (*Totanus semipalmatus*), which was very common and conspicuous on the Gulf Coast, assumed its full plumage late in February, and was not found breeding till April. These later observations were made at Clearwater. The Red-breasted Sandpiper (*Tringa canutus*) was common at Clearwater in February, as was also the Dunlin (*Tringa alpina americana*). A single record of *Tringa bonapartii* was made at Clearwater in February.

At Panasofkee Lake, one of the most numerous and conspicuous species was the Courlan or Crying Bird (*Aramus pictus*), where its principal food seemed to be the species of snail on which the Everglade Kite preyed, but I did not observe this species at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River and it is unknown to the hunters about Clearwater. There are numerous fresh-water lakes and ponds in the country about Clearwater, notably among which is Lake Butler, a very considerable sheet of water, but frequent visits to such places confirm me in the belief that the Courlan does not obtain in this region now. It is very rapidly becoming exterminated where it was once so abundant. While travelling on the Oclawaha in the winter of 1875-76 I saw it in countless numbers, but going over the same ground in the winter of 1879-80 I observed less than ten individuals.

At Clearwater and just south of it, and particularly at points on Old Tampa Bay, I found the Reddish Egret (*Ardea rufa*) abundant. While most common in the dark plumage, many were noted and some obtained in the white plumage, the so-called *Ardea pealii*. They began breeding in March and were breeding commonly in April, Mr. Devereux obtaining numerous sets of their eggs, varying from four to six in number. This gentleman found young in both plumages in the same nest where the parents were both blue birds.

I was struck during the *early* part of the breeding season, with the coloration about the bill and face in some of the Herons, and not finding descriptions of the same conditions I append the following: *Ardea cærulea*. In this species, in both plumages, I have, in a very large series collected at the three points visited, noted that the iris is light straw color. But a series of twelve individuals collected at Clearwater in a little lake where they had just begun to breed, the date being 20th March, 1880, the iris was deep lead color and in one case brown or hazel. These are the only individuals of this species that I have taken at just this period, viz., at the beginning of the breeding season, but this is apparently the coloration of the part in question at that season.

On March 15, at the lower end of Old Tampa Bay, I made the following notes with regard to the coloration of the lores, face, and eyes of the Louisiana Heron (*Ardea leucogastra leucocorymna*). The notes are from twelve individuals freshly killed, and the nesting season had advanced as far as the completion of

the nest, for only in one nest out of fifty just finished was a single egg found. The specimens, as in the last case, were both males and females: "Lores and base of bill, deep, dark blue with no trace of orange or any shade of yellow. *No yellow on bill or face* at any point. The iris, in nine cases, deep bright red; in the other three, red, with a tinge of yellowish. Later in the season, about April 1st, some females show yellowish about the bill and have yellow irides, but the males are still as above described."*

I found the Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctiardea violacea*) not uncommon at Clearwater, and also secured a series of the species at Panasofkee Lake. Mr. Devereux found the Least Bittern (*Ardetta exilis*) breeding very commonly at Clearwater early in April.

The most common small Tern noted on the Gulf Coast throughout the winter was Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*), and until early spring all obtained were in the "*havelli*" stage. They were abundant during my stay at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River, and were noted daily at Clearwater, where early in February I obtained individuals in full plumage. Mr. Devereux obtained the Least Tern (*Sterna superciliaris*) breeding very commonly in May.

All the Ducks noted by Mr. Allen were obtained, and, in addition, a single specimen of the Ring-necked Duck (*Fuligula collaris*) at Panasofkee Lake, where I noted the species on two occasions. At the mouth of Withlacoochee River, in January, I observed a single Buffle-headed Duck (*Clangula albeola*), a male in full plumage.

* [These observations are of special interest as giving the first account of the coloration of the face and bill in this species in the breeding season based on Florida examples. Mr. C. B. Cory has observed the same conditions among the Louisiana Herons met with by him at the Bahama Islands (see *Birds of the Bahama Islands*, 1880, pp. 168, 169, plate, and "*Oologist*," Vol. V, p. 79, Dec., 1880), and finding no account of similar features in relation to this species as observed elsewhere has made this seasonal phase of coloration in these parts the basis of a new species, named by him *Ardea cyanirostris*. — J. A. ALLEN.]