

Snow Bunting — A new species for Mississippi

Jerome A. Jackson and C. Dwight Cooley

AT 8:15 A.M. ON NOVEMBER 14, 1977, Jackson discovered a Snow Bunting (Figure 1 *Plectrophenax nivalis*) on the asphalt parking lot adjacent to the biology building on the Mississippi State University campus in Oktibbeha County, east-central Mississippi. The bunting was moving in the species' mouselike fashion among parked cars and was quite tame. It flew when a car came into the lot, but was rediscovered by Cooley on the asphalt and gravel roof of the biology building. The Snow Bunting remained in the immediate area and was seen by several persons. On November 17, Jackson trapped the bunting in a sparrow trap, banded it with a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service aluminum band, weighed and measured it, and released it. At 4 p.m., when captured, it weighed 40.1 g. Culmen length from the distal edge of the nostril was 7.9 mm; gonys was 5.3 mm. Both bill measurements were taken with a dial vernier caliper graduated to 0.05 mm. The flattened wing chord was 10.3 cm; tail length, measured from between the central rectrices was 5.9 cm to the tip of the longest central rectrix and 6.3 cm to the tip of the

longest outer rectrix. Both mandibles were yellow with a black medial ridge; the iris was a very dark brown, almost indistinguishable from the black pupil.

By November 22 it seemed that the Snow Bunting had established its winter residence in the immediate area. It spent most of its time on the roof where it fed on millet that had been put out for it. In general it kept in the shade, making photography difficult, though it allowed humans to approach within 2 m. The Snow Bunting was last seen at 4 p.m. on November 23 by Jackson. Its disappearance on the night of November 23 may have been due to the passage of a frontal system through the area, but might also be related to the discovery of the Snow Bunting's food supply by House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) or to a tremendous influx of American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*). The House Sparrows discovered the millet on the afternoon of November 23 and, although there were only four of them, the Snow Bunting kept its distance and was not seen feeding concurrently with the sparrows. Also on November 23, the Mississippi State Univ-

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Fig. 1. Snow Bunting, Oktibbeha County, Miss., Nov. 14-23, 1977.

ersity campus was invaded by thousands of robins. These were so numerous that the roof of the building always seemed to have at least 8-10 robins flying and hopping around and poking into litter in the gutters; these birds also seemed to be disruptive to the Snow Bunting.

THE SNOW BUNTING has not previously been included on the Mississippi checklist and to our knowledge this represents the first record of the species for the state. Stevenson (*Migrant* 14:20, 1943) reported having possibly heard a Snow Bunting at Birmingham, Alabama on January 24, 1940, although Imhof (*Alabama Birds*, University of Alabama Press, University, 1976) rejects this record. Lowery (*Louisiana Birds*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1974) reports a specimen that may have been

collected at Covington, Louisiana. James (*Proc. Ark. Acad. Sci.* 14:13, 1960) reported on a Snow Bunting specimen, the first record for Arkansas, collected at Calion on November 6, 1959. The Snow Bunting reported nearest to Mississippi appears to be that recorded by Oliver Irwin near Memphis, Tennessee on November 2, 1960. Browne (*Chat* 41:59-66, 1977) has reviewed other southeastern records of the Snow Bunting and it is obvious that this species has only rarely appeared in the south central states. We feel that the arrival of this Snow Bunting in Mississippi can be attributed to the blizzard conditions and unseasonable weather in the upper midwest during the previous week.

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