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NOTES ON THE PAINTED BUNTING AT MEMPHIS

By BEN B. COFFEY

The Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*), generally considered the most beautifully plumaged of our native birds, is a common bird in the lower Mississippi valley, ranging northward up the river until it becomes rare at the latitude of Tennessee. This species was inadvertently omitted from the Distributional List of the Birds of Tennessee, published early this year, although several records for this county had entitled it to a place in the list. As if in protest to the exclusion, five males and at least three females appeared on the scene here during the past nesting season.

Bird records for Memphis begin with 1928, being based on field trips by the writer and other observers made since that date. Since our field work has by no means included visits to all likely habitats of this bird, it could have existed in some places of course other than in those noted in the few and scattered records which follow. My first record was made May 26, 1929, when I discovered a male singing from the cross-bar of a telegraph pole along the Illinois Central Railroad, just south of the Memphis city limits at East Junction. It showed a preference for these cross-bars, as I attempted to learn its pretty but not forceful song, a song which bears a slight resemblance to that of the common Indigo Bunting. A short hunt for a possible nest was unsuccessful. The evening of May 29 I may have heard its song again, and on June 1st, with Eric Henrich, I saw the bird for a second time. This species was not observed again in 1929, but a male was seen here twice the next spring, one of the dates being May 2nd. John Bamberg also recorded a male in Riverside Park on May 2, 1930. A lookout was kept for them and East Junction was visited assiduously, but no other one was seen until this year. Very occasionally some one tells me of seeing a male Painted Bunting, and while it is conspicuously colored and should be easy to identify without confusing it with some other species, I have been inclined to disregard all but two instances. Gerald Capers, veteran Scout leader and nature student, saw one in Overton Park, the last part of April, 1927. Mrs. A. L. Heiskell saw one the past spring, as will be noted further on.

After two years' apparent absence, five male and three female Painted Buntings spent the summer of 1933 with us. Previous visitors were only seen once or twice, but Bunting No. 1 could be found from May to the middle of July any time we wanted to show it off to other bird lovers. No. 1 was discovered April 29 along the Illinois Central tracks and southward between North Second Street and the Wolf River. Its song led to its discovery and by learning to recognize the song we were able to locate the bird on most subsequent visits. This bird seemed to have a very large territory, about 400 by 200 yards, with several favorite perches. The next afternoon I returned with Mrs. Coffey and Bert Powell, so they could see their first in-

dividual of this species. A second trip at twilight was necessary, but fortune favored us, for as we turned to leave, the little beauty flew out of some weeds just in front of us. The first trip in May was unsuccessful, but on May 16 we observed it and on the 19th, saw our first female of this species. She is decidedly more yellowish and light greenish than the female Indigo Bunting. On the 21st Mrs. Coffey and I watched the pair over a half hour as they apparently were searching for a nesting site. The male would at times sing from the top of a pile of waste steel shavings or a gasoline storage tank. The Reelfoot expedition crowd listened to it on the 27th, and on June 1st it seemed to be covering as wide a range as ever. On June 18th an unsuccessful search for the nest was made in a few likely and frequented spots. July 9th the adults were found feeding three young, two about 4 to 5 days out of the nest, and one about 2 days out of same. The male did not sing. On the 13th it was found singing, this being the last time No. 1 was seen.

Meanwhile, Bert Powell was so elated over his first sight of this beautiful finch that he began to search for others near his home on the opposite or south side of town. On June 12 one was discovered on some high ground south of the Quaker Oats plant and verified by myself on June 17. On subsequent trips to search for a nest, no bird was seen by Bert, so we went again to the place on July 11 and found the male singing and a female. On the 13th, Bert found no female, but watched two males fight. The original No. 2 pair was seen July 17, the male again July 20, and on the 23rd he saw the female and one immature bird. This was the last record for No. 2. No. 3, his rival, was seen only on the 13th. On April 29, Mrs. A. L. Heiskell, of 1240 Tanglewood, noticed a beautiful varicolored bird in her yard. Her description was a perfect fit for the Bunting. A closely-built-up residential section, only a partial search could be made, and this individual was not found again unless it happened to be the same as No. 5, found two blocks away in a field near Lamar and Castalia by Bert Powell on July 28. We failed to find one at this location on August 6. This section is slightly over a mile from where numbers 2 and 3 were observed in combat.

While we were driving often to the opposite outskirts of the city, hoping to find the first nest of this species in Tennessee, a pair were nesting within two blocks of our apartment, near a bayou, and a stone's throw from the big Scars-Roebuck building. Miss Alice Smith, while playing tennis, thought she heard the bunting's song several times, but failed to find it on the only search she made. Miss Winifred Smith later remarked to her and to Mrs. Coffey, on Sunday, July 16, regarding a beautiful bird seen on her back porch about July 2nd. An immediate search failed to find No. 4, but on the next day, the 17th, Miss Alice Smith found a pair of Painted Buntings and a nest with three young, completely filling it. The nest, a small, cuplike structure of grasses and weeds, was located three feet above the ground in a small elm bush at the side of an old path. Any one using the path would have brushed the nest. Mrs. Coffey and I visited the site and found the singing male, but it took the earlier discoverer to point out the nest to us. She found the young still in the nest at noon on the 19th, but in the evening I found the nest empty. On July 25 I watched the female feeding a young bird which was following the parent around. This was our last record for the season.

During the coming Spring it will be interesting to observe to what extent these birds return to occupy their old territories. Other likely spots will be closely watched for additional pairs.

MEMPHIS, TENN., Nov., 1933.

NOTES ON DUCK HAWK NESTINGS

By F. M. JONES

The Duck Hawk (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), the most interesting of all the hawks, is not as plentiful as in the days of old, when they furnished sport for kings and nobility, and it is a tribute to their hardiness and resourcefulness that they exist at all, for the hand of man, except for a few of the nature lovers, are turned against all hawks alike. The principal reason for this is plain ignorance, for hawks in general are more beneficial than harmful, and something must be lacking in the makeup of a person who selfishly destroys something which they cannot appreciate. That the Duck Hawk feeds principally on birds is too well known to contradict, but if all the facts were known it is doubtful if they do much harm along that line, for Blue Jays and Crows, the enemies of all small birds, form an important part of their bill of fare. Even though they ate only birds rated as beneficial, man would have no right to exterminate them. Only last spring, 1933, a storm sweeping across the upper part of East Tennessee killed more small birds than all the Duck Hawks in the United States could consume in many years. Recently, an article came out in a national publication in which the writer stated that a pair of Duck Hawks coming under his observation in East Tennessee were, "as far as known, the only pair of Duck Hawks nesting in the Southeast portion of the United States." To the uninformed public this might be accepted as a fact, but it lacks quite a lot of being true, and the statement is to be regretted. Other pairs are known in the section he writes of, as well as in other parts of the State. Two of them found by Mr. Robert B. Lyle of Johnson City, Tennessee, have been visited by myself. These are in the upper part of East Tennessee, and due credit is given Mr. Lyle for the opportunity of getting first-hand information about their nesting. The first nest was found by Mr. Lyle several years ago, and after inspecting the situation several times it was found to be inaccessible on account of a tremendous overhang of the steep rock cliffs. The second pair of Duck Hawks were located by Mr. Lyle on April 2nd of this year—1933—and knowing my interest in finding their nest, he very generously turned the proposition over to me. On April 5th we went to the location with a view of finding the nest if possible, but as there was a half a mile or more of the cliffs along the river, making it possible for the exact site to be most anywhere along this front, we had our work cut out for us to start with. We started out at one end of the cliff, taking turns going over and being pulled back or climbing hand over hand if the distance was not too much for us, using a single length of stout rope. Just as it was getting dark we found on a narrow ledge the egg shells of the past season's hatching and not far from them on the same ledge was a hole rounded out in the fine soil which covered the rocks, with a few downy feathers in it. The hawks by this time were making considerable fuss, so we were satisfied we had succeeded in our mission of finding their nest. Mr. Lyle came back the following Sunday to try to locate the nest for me, not thinking I had found it, and after watching the hawks through a pair of binoculars going to a certain ledge numerous times, got the impression that they had young in that particular place and wrote me to that effect. While I was confident that I had located the nesting ledge on my first trip, Mr. Lyle wrote me so convincingly that I decided there was no use waiting for three weeks longer, as I had at first intended, so I went back on April 14th. After prospecting his location and finding nothing, I went over the cliffs to the place I had previously located and there found one egg in the hole which the hawk had rounded out. We waited until the 22nd, and went

