

Annotated List of Summer Birds of the McCurtain Game Preserve, McCurtain County, Oklahoma¹

WILLIAM A. CARTER, East Central State College, Ada

The opportunities to study the avifauna of virgin stands of our southern forests are rapidly passing. This paper presents a list of summer birds from an area in southeastern Oklahoma. A detailed description of the Preserve and a report on the nesting bird population have been presented elsewhere (Carter, 1967). The Preserve, under the administration of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, includes 15,220 acres of mountainous land in the southern portion of the Ouachita Uplift. Elevations vary from 561 ft above sea level along the Mountain Fork of the Little River to 1,363 ft on Pine Mountain in the east central part of the Preserve. The Preserve includes three distinct habitats: the river bottom, along the Mountain Fork River; the stream bottom, along the small streams; and, the upland areas.

In each species account, information is given concerning the summer status, habitat preference, and other pertinent data from field notes compiled in the Preserve during the summers of 1961 and 1962.

Ardea herodias Linnaeus: Great Blue Heron. Postnesting wanderer. First summer observations were on 18 June 1961 and 19 July 1962. Observed feeding along the river after these dates.

Florida caerulea (Linnaeus): Little Blue Heron. Postnesting wanderer. A single observation on 19 July 1962 of an immature bird feeding along the river.

Casmerodius albus (Linnaeus): Common Egret. Postnesting wanderer. No records during the summer of 1961. First recorded on 19 July 1962 and frequently observed along the river after this date.

Note: The weather had been very hot and dry from the last of June to 15 July 1962. Rains occurred the 15th, 16th, and 17th. The morning of the 19th was warm and there was a dense fog. I assume the weather change prompted the movement of these birds.

Anas discors Linnaeus: Blue-winged Teal. Migrant. A small flock on Linson Creek and another on the river were observed in the Preserve area on 27 August 1961.

Aix sponsa (Linnaeus): Wood Duck. Nesting. One individual was seen in late June and four were seen on 6 July 1961. A pair in breeding plumage was seen examining a hole high in a sycamore tree near the river on 27 March 1962. Two were seen on 12 June and four were seen together from 15 June to 24 June in the same area. One of the four was an adult female and the others were immatures. The March record was the only time I observed the male during 1962.

Cathartes aura (Linnaeus): Turkey Vulture. Nesting. This species was very common over the entire area. Nesting was probably completed before the first of June when my observations began. They have been reported to nest in rock slides in some of the sheltered ravines in the general area. Immature individuals were seen in mid-June. Groups of five to ten frequently roosted in the dead trees along the river.

Accipiter cooperii (Bonaparte): Cooper's Hawk. Possible nesting. Possible sight records in upland area on 16 and 23 June 1962, but these need substantiation.

¹Contribution No. 426 from the Department of Zoology, Oklahoma State University and Department of Biology, ECSC.

Buteo lineatus (Gmelin): Red-shouldered Hawk. Nesting. Adults were observed carrying food to nests during both summers. All nests were in the river bottom habitat, although the adults commonly perched in the tall pines on hill tops along the river. The exclusive use of this one habitat was attested by the fact that I had only one record of this form in upland habitat away from the river. Territories were estimated to be about one square mile and the two nest sites observed were 1.25 miles apart.

Buteo platypterus (Vieillot): Broad-winged Hawk. Nesting. A nest located on 19 June 1961 was 40 feet up in a mature shortleaf pine along Panther Branch. One adult was observed in the area and there were two downy young in the nest. The young were out of the nest on 28 June. This species was recorded along Panther Branch and North Linson Creek during 1962. An adult was observed on a nest in the river bottom area on 27 March 1964.

Falco sparverius Linnaeus: Sparrow Hawk. Nesting. This species nested in upland habitat and was much more common along White Oak Mountain than in other areas of the Preserve. An adult female was observed feeding a large, fully feathered young in a nest hole in a dead pine 20 July 1961. Family groups of 3 and 4 were noted along White Oak Mountain 19 June 1962.

Colinus virginianus (Linnaeus): Bobwhite. Nesting. Frequently observed in the river bottom in 1961; one nest with four eggs was located in the stream bottom habitat 10 July 1961. Family groups were observed in the stream bottom from 29 June to 5 July 1962 and family groups were noted in uplands during both summers. The nest in the stream bottom was located in a clump of *Andropogon* sp. in a brushy opening of the woodland along Panther Branch.

Meleagris gallopavo Linnaeus: Turkey. Nesting. A hen and 3 poults were observed in the river bottom 6 July 1961; also other family groups were noted along Linson Creek in late summer of both years. No nests were found and I had very few upland observations.

Actitis macularia (Linnaeus): Spotted Sandpiper. Migrant. One individual was seen 18 July 1961 along the river and was seen there regularly the remainder of the month.

Coccyzus americanus (Linnaeus): Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Nesting. This species was found in all habitats of the Preserve. A nest with two eggs was located 1 July 1961 in the river bottom about 10 ft high in a small elm. The nest had a bulky stick and leaf base lined with a mat of the tree lichen *Usnea*. Another nest with one egg and one newly hatched young was located in the river bottom 19 July 1962. A third nest containing two eggs was found in a small flowering dogwood in an upland site along Barn Branch 26 June 1962.

Geococcyx californianus (Lesson): Roadrunner. Nesting. I had observations of single individuals in upland areas during both summers. An adult and three young were seen 17 June 1962 on Pine Mountain.

Otus asio (Linnaeus): Screech Owl. Nesting. This species was observed along Panther Branch and in the upland association. Probably nested during both summers in an area of very dense second-growth pines at a chimney in the old CCC camp site; a group of three was observed regularly from 26 June 1961 to early August and also, from 4 July 1962 to the end of the month. Although this area was less than 0.5 mile from my quarters, I rarely heard these owls at night. All individuals were of the red color phase.

Strix varia Barton: Barred Owl. Nesting. This species was frequently heard in the evening along the river bottom during both summers, although I have but one sight record on 5 July 1961 of an adult.

Caprimulgus carolinensis Gmelin: Chuck-will's-widow. Nesting. Found commonly in the drier areas of the levee area of the river bottom and most often heard from this area. A nest with 2 eggs was located on 8 June 1962 in upland type area in litter on forest floor. An adult and two young just able to fly were found in the mature pine upland near the headquarters buildings on 1 July 1962.

Caprimulgus vociferus Willson: Whip-poor-will. Postnesting wanderer. One individual was heard at 8:15 p.m. 21 July 1961 about 3 miles east of the Preserve. I have no other records for this form and although this was outside the Preserve, I have included this record because of the lack of information concerning this form in eastern Oklahoma.

Chaetura pelagica (Linnaeus): Chimney Swift. Nesting. Seen commonly over the river and ravines of the Preserve. Undoubtedly some of these nest in natural situations; however, the only roosting and nesting site I was able to locate was the chimney of the manager's home.

Archilochus colubris (Linnaeus): Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Nesting. Found along the river bottom and creeks. Distribution and abundance is probably regulated by the distribution of trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*) and horsemint (*Monarda* sp.).

Megaceryle alcyon (Linnaeus): Belted Kingfisher. Feeding visitant; possible nesting. A pair fed regularly during both summers along the river and rested at the mouth of Barn Branch. I believe that these birds nested outside the Preserve.

Colaptes auratus (Linnaeus): Yellow-shafted Flicker. Nesting. I had no record during the summer of 1961. A pair was found regularly in an area of large dead pines with Red-headed Woodpeckers and Sparrow Hawks during the summer of 1962. An individual was seen along Linson Creek in mid-July 1962.

Dryocopus pileatus (Linnaeus): Pileated Woodpecker. Nesting. I found one nest hole in the river bottom habitat in a large sycamore near a shallow sink hole. The nest opening was about 30 ft from the ground. These birds were generally seen working through the woodlands in pairs. They constantly called while working. The area covered by a pair was probably slightly more than a square mile.

Centurus carolinus (Linnaeus): Red-bellied Woodpecker. Nesting. One pair nested in a dead snag along the river bottom in June of both years and remained in the same area during the entire study periods. This species was frequently observed in the stream bottom and upland habitats, also.

Melanerpes erythrocephalus (Linnaeus): Red-headed Woodpecker. Nesting. Found nesting only in areas of upland habitat with several large dead snags; thus, the distribution was concentrated in small areas over the Preserve.

Dendrocopos villosus (Linnaeus): Hairy Woodpecker. Nesting. Found most frequently in the river bottom habitat. The populations of Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers were about equal in the Preserve. Family groups were noted up to 5 July 1962.

Dendrocopos pubescens (Linnaeus): Downy Woodpecker. Nesting. The nesting of both the Downy and Hairy Woodpecker was probably completed before the field study began; however, family groups of *D. pubescens* were found until mid-June during both summers.

Dendrocopos borealis (Vieillot): Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Nesting. Nest holes were observed in several of the large, mature pines (d.b.h. 15+ inches) along the upland study area and also along North Linson

Creek. As the nest trees are rather easy to spot, I feel these were about the only concentrations in the Preserve. I doubt if there were more than 10 pairs of active nesting birds in the Preserve; my actual count was 7 pairs.

Myiarchus crinitus (Linnaeus): Great Crested Flycatcher. Nesting. Seemed to prefer the ridge woodlands with mixed post oak, blackjack oak, white oak, and shortleaf pine to the areas where the shortleaf pines were in greater dominance. The greater abundance of nesting cavities in the mixed oak woodlands was an important factor in their distribution within the Preserve.

Empidonax virescens (Vieillot): Acadian Flycatcher. Nesting. One of the more common species along the river bottom and stream bottoms. Observed feeding young in early June.

Contopus virens (Linnaeus): Eastern Wood Pewee. Nesting. Found locally along the river bottom and larger creeks with a more even distribution in the upland. Observed feeding young in mid-June during both summers. One nest containing two young was located along Barn Branch 8 June 1962 about 12 feet from the ground in a small American holly.

Cyanocitta cristata (Linnaeus): Blue Jay. Nesting. Population showed about equal densities in stream bottoms and uplands. The population within the Preserve appeared to be relatively low compared to that found in the more open areas outside the Preserve.

Corvus brachyrhynchos Brehm: Common Crow. Nesting. A family group ranged over the river bottom during both summers. Frequently observed in other habitats.

Parus carolinensis Audubon: Carolina Chickadee. Nesting. Common inhabitant in all habitats. Family groups of from 3 to 7 were noted up to late July of both summers. No young birds just out of the nest, or any nests, were ever located, even in early June. Nesting was completed by late May and the family groups remained together throughout the first summer, at least until early August.

Parus bicolor Linnaeus: Tufted Titmouse. Nesting. About equally distributed over all habitats of the Preserve. Nesting activities more conspicuous during June; birds became quiet by mid-July.

Sitta carolinensis Latham: White-breasted Nuthatch. Nesting. Appears to be about equally common in all woodland habitats. Nesting was probably completed prior to June.

Sitta pusilla Latham: Brown-headed Nuthatch. Nesting. Nesting was completed well before the first of June. A single individual was observed near the main gate in upland mature pine on 24 June 1961. A group of three was observed in late August in the mature pines on the ridge at the crossroads north of the Field Cabin. During June and July 1962 a family group was seen and heard regularly in the mature pines in the Turkey Pen area. This form was always observed in the crown cover of the mature pines.

Thryothorus ludovicianus (Latham): Carolina Wren. Nesting. This species was equally common in the river bottom and ravines; found in upland habitats about half as frequently. Family groups ranged in size of three to seven, with the average of about four. Commonly found near drift piles, thickets, and rock ledges. Foraged on the ground and in the undergrowth in all habitats.

Hylocichla mustelina (Gmelin): Wood Thrush. Nesting. Rarely seen, but frequently heard both summers in dense undergrowth of river bottom; in 1962 noted in ravines; common in uplands in summer of 1962.

Most of my upland observations were from areas with an abundance of oaks; fewer were noted in areas of pure pine. I cannot explain the absence of this species in the uplands during the summer of 1961.

Poliotilta caerulea (Linnaeus): Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Nesting. Most common in summer of 1961 in the river bottom. Populations about equal in all types in 1962. Appear to favor crown cover of woodlands, especially the dense edge near the river. One damaged nest was found at the base of a tall cypress in a gravel bar in the river. This species was very common on White Oak Mountain.

Vireo griseus (Boddaert): White-eyed Vireo. Nesting. An abundant summer bird along the river bottom; lesser numbers found along the creeks. No records for uplands except for postnesting birds seen in last August.

Vireo olivaceus (Linnaeus): Red-eyed Vireo. Nesting. The most abundant breeding bird in the Preserve. Found in all habitats in larger breeding populations than any other form.

Mniotilta varia (Linnaeus): Black-and-white Warbler. Nesting. Most commonly found in the river bottom during June and July and less frequently along the ravines. Rather common in upland areas in late August. Forages in mid-branches.

Protonotaria citrea (Boddaert): Prothonotary Warbler. Nesting. Rare along Mountain Fork River within the Preserve. The rapid rises which normally occur along the river remove most of the dead snags which would serve as nest sites. I have notes on a family group of four on 6 July 1961. Single singing males were seen in mid-June of both summers.

Limnithlypis swainsonii (Audubon): Swainson's Warbler. Nesting; rare. An adult was observed feeding one young on 26 July 1961 on the ground in the cane thickets of the river bottom. A pair of adults was seen in the undergrowth near the same location on 30 June 1962.

Helminthos vermivorus (Gmelin): Worm-eating Warbler. Nesting; rare. A pair of adults was observed feeding one young in an area of dense undergrowth of the river bottom on 5 July 1961. A pair of adults was observed feeding and carrying food in the same area from 24 June to mid-July 1962. This species was also observed along Hee Creek on 20 July 1962, but this record is not considered a nesting individual because of the late date.

Parula americana (Linnaeus): Parula Warbler. Nesting. Found in equal numbers along the river bottom and the ravines; observed less frequently in upland areas. One nest with four young was found on 9 July 1962 in pendant arboreal lichens about 8 ft from the ground in a small flowering dogwood tree in an upland situation. The nest was collected after the young left it 17 July. Only lichens were used in constructing the nest and little evidence that the mass contained a nest could be observed by very close inspection.

Dendroica cerulea (Wilson): Cerulean Warbler. Nesting; rare. During the summer of 1961, at least three pairs were nesting in the 35-acre river bottom study area. These were observed from early June to the last of June. From mid-June to the last of June, the adults were feeding young. I had no further observations until late August when adults in bright plumage were noted in upland habitat near the river bottom area. The single observation during 1962 was in late June when an adult and one young were seen in the river bottom area. Generally, they were observed on mid-branches in the dense edge of the river bottom near the river.

Dendroica dominica (Linnaeus): Yellow-throated Warbler. Probable nesting; summer status uncertain. The few observations I have of this species are: 19 July 1961, one adult in upland habitat in a large oak; 27 August 1961, three solitary adults along Panther Creek in an oak-pine area; 9 June 1962, one adult in upland habitat in a mature pine stand; 14 June 1962, two solitary adults in upland habitat in mature oaks; 24 June 1962, one adult in upland mature pine stand; 28, 29 March 1963, several solitary adults in upland mature oak-pine stands. All records are of foraging birds in crown cover. It seems probable that this form had completed nesting prior to early June when I started my studies.

Dendroica pinus (Wilson): Pine Warbler. Nesting. Common in upland areas and found about half as frequently in the ravine habitat. Adults were commonly seen feeding young through June and to mid-July. This warbler generally forages in the crown cover of the mature pines.

Dendroica discolor (Vieillot): Prairie Warbler. Status uncertain. A pair of adults was observed on 24 June 1961 carrying food into a dense tangle of greenbrier and second-growth oaks along the road at the main gate. A singing male was observed in similar habitat near the gate north of Barn Branch from 25 June to 3 July 1961.

Seturus aurocapillus (Linnaeus): Ovenbird. Nesting. This species was observed in about equal numbers in the dryer parts of the river bottom, ravines, and in the brushy areas of the uplands. No nests were found, but several observations were made of adults carrying food to young out of the nest. Generally recorded on the ground or in lower levels of sparse undergrowth.

Seturus motacilla (Vieillot): Louisiana Waterthrush. Nesting. A common nesting bird along the river, with about half the nesting density along the same dense understory habitat of the creeks. Young were out of the nest in early June in both summers. Family groups seemed to maintain feeding territories into late July. Foraged along stream banks and on floor of the river bottom forests.

Oporonis formosus (Wilson): Kentucky Warbler. Nesting. Common in undergrowth of the river bottom during both summers; records in ravine habitat in summer of 1961. Young and adults together from early June to mid-July.

Icteria virens (Linnaeus): Yellow-breasted Chat. Probably nesting. Two pairs were located each summer in the dense cane thickets near the north fence of the river bottom study area. The birds stayed in the same areas from early June to late July. Observed only in this dense undergrowth in the Preserve; however, I have upland observations in McCurtain County outside the Preserve.

Wilsonia citrina (Boddaert): Hooded Warbler. Nesting. A common nesting bird in areas of the river bottom with dense undergrowth. Populations about the same during both summers. Song and feeding activity suggest two broods, with the first nesting ending in mid-June and a second nesting period reaching a peak in early July. Foraged in the dense cane; sang from low shrubs and cane—only rarely observed as high as the midbranches of the understory trees.

Setophaga ruticilla (Linnaeus): American Redstart. Nesting. Probably a first nesting is completed by early June and later nestings to mid-July. A common bird in the river bottom; generally ranges in the mid-branches and crown cover, moving quickly from one spot to another. No observations of this form in any other habitat type.

Piranga olivacea (Gmelin): Scarlet Tanager. Nesting. Nested in small numbers in the uplands—more commonly found in areas of mature

pinus. Males may be singing in crown cover or midbranches of the pines. Family groups observed in mid-June. Two nests: 10 ft from ground on horizontal branch of young pine, with two young on 3 July 1960; and, 30 ft from ground on horizontal branch in mature pine with female on nest and male in area on 8 June 1962.

Piranga rubra (Linnaeus): Summer Tanager. Nesting. A nesting bird of the upland crown cover and midbranches. During the summer of 1961 the two populations of tanagers were about equal; in 1962 the Summer Tanagers were more frequently observed than the Scarlet Tanagers (about 2:1). Family groups observed in mid-June to early July.

Richmondia cardinalis (Linnaeus): Cardinal. Nesting. Commonly observed in midbranches and undergrowth of the river bottom habitat. One nest with three eggs located on 18 June 1961; family groups observed from mid-June to early July. A female was carrying sticks to a nest site in the river bottom area on 11 July 1962, but no later observations of activity at the site were made.

Passerina cyanea (Linnaeus): Indigo Bunting. Nesting. Commonly observed in the undergrowth in the river bottom; one nest found on 11 July 1961 with three eggs was about 7 ft from the ground in an open area with tall, dense cover. This was probably a second nesting, as family groups were observed in mid-June during both summers. Also found in upland and ravine areas where it frequented the midbranches and undergrowth. From my limited observations, this appeared to be a common species on White Oak Mountain.

Spizella passerina (Bechstein): Chipping Sparrow. Nesting. In the Preserve, this species was found in the more open areas of the uplands. Foraged on the ground and in the undergrowth; frequently seen singing from midbranches of pine and oak trees. Much more common in the more open areas outside the Preserve.

LITERATURE CITED

- Carter, W. A. 1967. Ecology of the nesting birds of the McCurtain Game Preserve, McCurtain County, Oklahoma. Wilson Bull. 79:259-272.
-