

in Great Britain. In spite of differences in location and latitude, there are amazing similarities in the 4 data sets.

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Some Bird Lore Collected in Mississippi

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Bird lore, like general folklore, transcends geographical boundaries. Thus it is that there may be many similarities to such lore as found in Mississippi with that found in other localities.

The folklore pertaining to birds which is used here was collected for the most part in Alcorn County, one of the hill counties in northeast Mississippi. Some of it, however, is from Decatur and Hattiesburg. My informants for this article were Ovid Vickers, Decatur; Mrs. R. T. Davis, Hattiesburg; Mrs. Troy Norvell, Alcorn county; Mrs. Alfred Crum, Alcorn County. My own contributions will be designated by P. I live at Corinth, Alcorn County. The informants will be designated by the first letter of their surnames.

The superstition heard most often pertained to owls. Puckett (1926, Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro. Univ. N. Carolina Press, Chapel Hill)

stated that in Europe and Africa the hooting of an owl near a house is indicative of the death of one of the inmates. He suggested that this almost universal superstition is "doubtless due to the nocturnal habits of the bird and his half-human cry, and possibly represents a remnant of the belief of the Middle Ages that such birds were evil spirits coming to devour the souls of the dying".

Several informants stated that a Screech Owl's cry is a sign of death (V,N,D). A Screech Owl can be made to be quiet by tying a knot in the shirttail or by putting a hat on backwards (V). Turning a shoe bottomsides up is another way of quieting a Screech Owl (N).

Other superstitions concerning birds as omens of death or bad luck: A white bird in a black flock is a sure sign of death (V); a bird in the house is a sign of death or bad luck (P); a bird fluttering against the windowpane is a sign of bad luck (P).

Beliefs concerning birds and the weather of the seasons: When seagulls fly out early and far to the seaward, moderate wind and fair weather may be expected (N); when blackbirds are shrill early in the morning, rain will follow (N); birds flocking for food in early afternoon means bad weather is coming (N); White-throats may come three or four weeks early but when they sing loud winter is here (N).

Folk observations concerning the distress noises of birds: When different birds raise their voices in distress usually a snake is nearby (N); birds make a different noise if the snake is a poisonous one (N); jaybirds make a racket when a snake is near (C).

Birds as farmers' friends: When you hear the first Whip-poor-will it is time to plant cotton (V); when you hear the first dove, it is time to plant corn (C).

Beliefs about crows: When you see very disturbed crows, their leader has died (N); they have a ceremony for picking a new leader (N). The leader of the crows serves as a guard when the flock is feeding; he will chase a hawk (N).

Folk observations about geese: On the sixth of January the geese would marry (C); later the gander would stand guard over the nest (C).

Courtship of Mockingbirds: The cock and hen face each other then take two steps back; each one will go two steps to the right, then two steps to the left, two steps to meet and repeat the sequence many times (N).

Courtship of pigeons: The cock and hen face each other, then step forward and touch beaks; then back a few steps; again forward and touch beaks. This sequence is repeated many times (P).

This counting out rhyme used in children's games mentions birds: "Wire brier limberlock, three geese in a flock (V) (one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest...)" (P) The rhyme usually

ended with the words "O-U-T spells out, you old dirty dishrag you". The child pointed to by the leader when saying "you" had to be "it" (P).

A folk remedy for croup: This was made by boiling the fat from a Pileated Woodpecker. This was given by mouth (N).

A superstition about birds and human diseases: There is a belief that birds will leave an infected area during an epidemic. This was noted in a Corinth newspaper during a yellow fever scare in the state. A large flock of "speckled" hawks in migration had been sighted over the town (P).

Perhaps this brief collection of folklore pertaining to birds in Mississippi will encourage others to collect such lore. One may even come across a superstition or belief that is unique for this state.

First Nesting Record of Gray Kingbirds in Mississippi

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From 20 to 24 May 1976, Wayne C. Weber observed a pair of Gray Kingbirds (Tyrannus dominicensis) at the National Park Service ranger station on Horn Island, Jackson County, Mississippi, within the Mississippi section of Gulf Islands National Seashore. The birds appeared to be occupying a territory, and were seen at various times to pursue Eastern Kingbirds (Tyrannus tyrannus), Fish Crows (Corvus ossifragus), and Mockingbirds (Mimus polyglottos); however, no nest could be found at that time. The nest, a flimsy structure built on a slash pine (Pinus elliottii) limb about 18 feet from the ground and 4 feet from the trunk, was finally located about 6 June by Mike Batton of the Park Services staff. The birds were observed about the nest on numerous occasions during June by Batton and by park ranger Robert McDonald, but the nest contents could not be determined.

On 28 June, Weber, Jackson, and Richard Rummel visited the locality and discovered young in the top of a slash pine near the nest tree (Fig. 1). These were fed several times by both parents. To our knowledge, this is the first confirmed nesting of Gray Kingbirds in Mississippi.

We know of only three previously published records of Gray Kingbirds in the state, all of single birds. The first was one collected by Sterling G. Clawson and Lovett E. Williams (MOS Newsletter 7(3):12, 1962)