

SUMMARY OF BREEDING DATA FOR THE SWAINSON'S WARBLER (*LIMNOTHLYPIS SWAINSONII*) IN ALABAMA, 1912–2004

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INTRODUCTION

Although the Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) is known to occur in dense, swampy, stream and floodplain bottoms over most of Alabama and probably breeds wherever it is heard singing in spring and summer, few positive nesting records have been reported from the state. In this report, I summarize the current nesting records of Swainson's Warbler in Alabama and provide new information concerning its breeding biology in the state.

METHODS

Between 2000 and 2004 the author collected breeding data on Swainson's Warblers in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta in an area 1.6 km (1 mile) due east of the confluence of the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers in north Baldwin County, about 48 km (30 miles) above Mobile (N31°08'24.4 W87°54'37.2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the study 30 nests were located, bringing the total number of nests found in Alabama to 33 (Table 1).

Inclusive dates from Baldwin County. — Males were heard singing between 31 March and 18 September. Nest building was first observed on 24 April (nest almost completed) and was last seen on 9 July. Nests with eggs were located between 30 April - 15 July, and nestlings were found between 2 June - 19 July. Fledged young were seen between 25 May - 2 August, and independent young were noted on 14 June. From these data, the breeding season extended from the third week in April to the first week in August.

Nests. — Eighteen of the 33 nests (55%) contained eggs or nestlings when found (16 with eggs, two with nestlings). Of these, two (11%) were parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds. Of 11 nests containing full sets of eggs, seven held three eggs and four contained four, for an average clutch size of 3.4 (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Summary of breeding data for the Swainson's Warbler in Alabama, 1912-2004.

Nest No./Yr	Date Found	Nest			Location in			County	Observer(s)
		Height	Density	Thicket	Thicket	Density	Thicket		
1-1912	5-May	2 eggs	moderate	edge of slough	Lauderdale/Colbert	A.H. Howell			
2-1912	8-May	empty, nest complete	moderat	edge of slough	Lauderdale/Colbert	A.H. Howell			
1-1977	7 May	4 eggs, 19 May	dense	interior	Calhoun	B. Summerour			
1-2000	12 June	3 eggs, 18 June	moderate	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
2-2000	14 June	1 infertile egg, young fledged	moderate	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
3-2000	14 June	empty, reason unknown	2.1 dense	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
4-2000	20 June	empty, fledged	0.9 dense	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
5-2000	9 July	2 fresh eggs	2.3 moderate	edge	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
1-2001	12 May	1 fresh egg	2.1 moderate	edge of road	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
2-2001	16 May	4 eggs	moderate	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
3-2001	19 May	3 eggs	moderate	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
4-2001	23 May	3 eggs	thin	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
5-2001	2 June	3 nestlings	moderate	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
6-2001	24 June	3 eggs	moderate	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
7-2001	24 June	1 infertile egg, fledged	4.1 dense	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
8-2001	24 June	2 eggs on 24 June; 4 on 30 June	2.7 moderate	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
9-2001	30 June	empty, fledged	2.7 thin	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
10-2001	8 July	2 infertile eggs	1.8 dense	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
11-2001	8 July	2 nestlings	2.0 dense	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
12-2001	8 July	3 eggs	1.5 dense	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
13-2001	2 August	empty, fledged	2.1 thin	edge	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
1-2002	26 April	building	2.7 dense	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
2-2002	30 April	3 eggs	moderate	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
3-2002	5 May	empty, predator	1.5 moderate	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
4-2002	25 May	empty, fledged	1.2 moderate	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
5-2002	25 May	2 infertile eggs	moderate	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour, K. Gauldin			
6-2002	25 May	2 eggs, 1 cowbird egg	0.8 thin	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
7-2002	17 June	2 eggs, 1 cowbird egg	2.1 dense	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
8-2002	15 July	3 eggs on 15th; 3 nestlings on 19th	3.0 moderate	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
9-2002	15 July	empty, fledged	1.7 moderate	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
10-2002	28 July	empty, reason unknown	1.4 moderate	edge of slough	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
1-2003	22 May	4 eggs	1.4 dense	edge of road	Baldwin	B. Summerour			
1-2004	24 April	building, nest almost completed	2.4 moderate	interior	Baldwin	B. Summerour, K. Gauldin			
			0.9 dense	edge of Bear Ck.	Baldwin	B. Summerour			

Nest heights. — Height of nest from the ground ranged from 0.6 m (1'10") to 4.1 m (13'6"), for an average height of 1.8 m (6'1") statewide and 1.9 m (6'3") in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta (Table 1).

Habitat. — All 30 of the nests found by the author in the Delta, and the two found by A.H. Howell (1928) on an island in the Tennessee River near Florence, were placed in cane thickets (Figs. 1 and 2). Only the Calhoun County nest was not in cane (Summerour, 1979). Eighteen nests (55%) were in thickets of moderate density, 11 (33%) in dense cane, and 4 (12%) in thin cane. Eighteen were in the interior of thickets and 15 (45%) near the edge, often near sloughs (Table 1). One nest (8-2001) was built in a holly tree (*Ilex decidua*) within a cane thicket.

During the spring and summer of 2003 the entire Delta was under water. The only nest found that season was placed 1.5 m (5') above knee-deep water in the interior of a cane thicket of moderate density. There was no high ground within hundreds of meters.

During the 2004 season, few birds were heard singing in the study area and only one nest was found. The loss of cane from the previous season of prolonged flooding was no doubt a contributing factor in the decline of Swainson's Warblers in the area.



FIGURE 1. Swainson's Warbler nesting habitat in Mobile-Tensaw Delta, Baldwin Co., Alabama. Nest located in cane thicket (arrow). Photograph by B. Summerour on 13 May 2001.



FIGURE 2. Swainson's Warbler nest in cane thicket in Mobile-Tensaw Delta, Baldwin Co., Alabama. Photograph by B. Summerour on 30 April 2002.

LITERATURE CITED

- HOWELL, A.H. 1928. Birds of Alabama. Dept. of Game and Fisheries of Alabama. Birmingham Printing Co., Birmingham.
- SUMMEROUR, C.W. 1979. Nesting of the Swainson's Warbler in Alabama. *Alabama Birdlife* 27:6-10.

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