

**CONFIRMED, PROBABLE AND POSSIBLE BREEDING OF
PAINTED BUNTINGS (*PASSERINA CIRIS*) IN INLAND
ALABAMA**

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Imhof (1976) noted two breeding records for Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) in Alabama, both in Mobile Co. Jackson (2001) considered the species a "local breeder" on the Gulf Coast, primarily in the northwest corner of Mobile Bay, but also locally in extreme southwest Alabama with summer records and possible breeding near Jackson. At Gulf State Park, there are records of a territorial male in 1986 and 1987 at the same site (Jackson pers. comm.). Nevertheless, most literature indicates that Painted Buntings do not regularly breed in Alabama. Further, the eastern population of Painted Buntings along the coasts of Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina is well separated from the western population that extends only as far east as the western half of Mississippi (Lowther et al. 1999). Regional bird books for Mississippi and Georgia show a similar gap between the eastern and western populations (Burleigh 1958, Turcotte and Watts 1999). However, data collected during Georgia's recent Breeding Bird Atlas project, include records from Thomas and Cook counties in southwestern Georgia and a pair in Randolph Co. near the Alabama border (Schneider pers. comm.).

The breeding range appears to cover even more of Alabama than Jackson (2001) suggested. In this report we document breeding by one pair of Painted Buntings, and several other recent records of probable and possible breeding.

On 12 May 2001, Reed located two singing male Painted Buntings atop trees in hedgerows on Rabbit Road in western Montgomery Co. During the next eighteen days, one male Painted Bunting was observed on several occasions. On 30 May 2001, Gardella saw a female Painted Bunting fly across the road and perch on a small branch approximately 46 cm (18 in) off the ground. She preened for five minutes, flew up a little higher, surveyed her surroundings for approximately three minutes, and then flew up into the tree. A minute later, a male Painted Bunting flew from the same tree. On 3 and 4 June 2001, Pat Johnson saw the male and female Painted Buntings together, although she saw no evidence of breeding (pers. comm.). On 23 June, 2001, Gardella heard the male Painted Bunting sing a few short songs from the undergrowth along Rabbit Road and then saw it fly up and burst into song on the bare tree top where Reed had originally made his sightings. On 30 June 2001, Glenda McNair and John

Patterson (pers. comm.) watched a male Painted Bunting for 40 minutes, singing vigorously. A female was also seen in a nearby tree. On 29 July 2001, Gardella confirmed the breeding of Painted Buntings at the site by observing three fledglings begging for food. Two were quite brown, and one had considerable yellow. On 7 August 2001, he saw the male Painted Bunting chase an Indigo Bunting away from a tree in which at least two of the young Painted Buntings were perched.

While this record was the only confirmation of breeding, there were several other encounters with singing male Painted Buntings in 2001. While conducting survey work for the Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas project, Don Ware found evidence of probable breeding by observing singing male Painted Buntings in the Bradley central east block on 23 May, 1 June, and 20 June (Rick West pers. comm). On 10 June, Gardella saw one singing male Painted Bunting and heard two others in the central east block of the PineApple Quadrangle just south of the border between Wilcox and Monroe counties.

In 2002, Gardella found only one Painted Bunting at Rabbit Road, a singing second year male. Reed found a pair of Painted Buntings in southeastern Dallas Co. on CR 122 just east of Orrville on 7 June. He first noticed the male sitting quietly in a lone large tree located on the edge of an extensive clear cut. The clear cut was separated from a large cotton field by CR 122. The male flew into the cotton field and was joined by a female. Together they flew back into thick underbrush of the clear cut. After a few minutes, the male landed on CR122 crouching down so that the long axis of his body was parallel to the road. He then began to flutter his wings and move around erratically. The female flew down in front of him, held her body parallel to the ground, and lifted her tail upward about 45°. The pair copulated and the female flew back to the clear cut. The male flew into the cotton field and returned to the clear cut with a large grasshopper in his beak.

On 29 May, Ware saw a pair of Painted Buntings in southern Covington Co. in tall pines at the edge of a clear cut. On 17 June, Ware and Judy Self observed a single male Painted Bunting perched on top of a cedar tree in the Gallion Northwest Block located in Marengo Co. On 19 June, Ware saw another pair at the edge of a clear cut in southern Crenshaw Co. On the same day, he heard a singing male near a dirt road in the Conecuh National Forest in Covington Co.

Two years of records do not document regularity of breeding. In light of this evidence of breeding in several locations in inland Alabama, however, it appears likely that Painted Bunting is a localized breeder. Since Painted Buntings can be amazingly inconspicuous, and their songs confused with either that of an

Indigo Bunting or a Blue Grosbeak, the reported records may represent but a small portion of the breeding population in the state. Birders in south central and western Alabama should be alert to the possibility of hearing or seeing this species.

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