ARCHIVES CORNER

Herbert Stoddard Had Tung Groves

BY ROSE RODRIGUEZ

This spring when the tung trees were in bloom, I remembered a reference to Herbert Stoddard growing the trees at his Sherwood Plantation in Grady County, Georgia. The reference was in *Legacy of a Red Hills Plantation*, a history of Tall Timbers written by Robert L. Crawford and William R. Bruechheimer that was published in 2012. Crawford remembers seeing the grove when he visited Stoddard at Sherwood in April 1963.

Herbert Stoddard was a pioneer in the field of wildlife management whose Cooperative Quail Investigation led to publication of his classic, *The Bobwhite Quail*. Stoddard was a close friend of Henry Beadel, the owner of Tall Timbers Plantation. He was a forester whose method of managing longleaf pine forests in a sustainable way is called the Stoddard-Neel Approach. In Leon Neel's book, *The Art of Managing Longleaf,* he stated that on Sherwood, Stoddard grew quality timber, but also planted about 125 acres of tung trees as a cash crop.

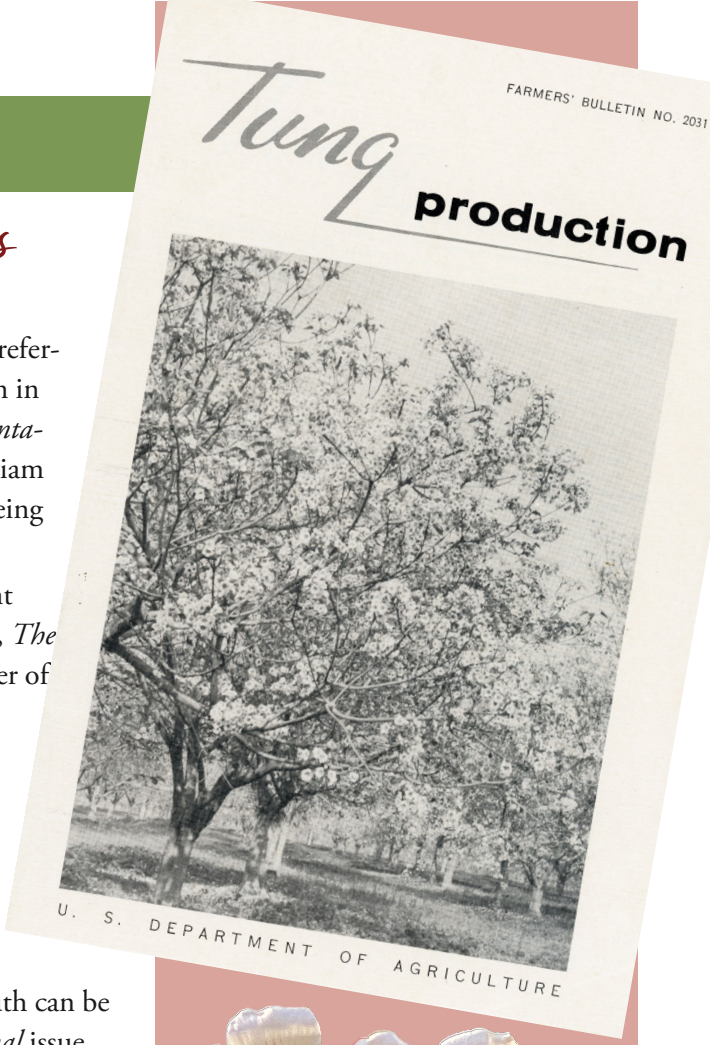
Tung trees produce a nut, which is an oilseed. The oil extracted is used in paints, varnishes and lacquers and as a waterproofing agent. A discussion of the Tung tree industry in the Gulf Coast states of the South can be read in the feature, "What's That Blooming?" on page 36 of this *eJournal* issue.

Although tung trees had been introduced from China at the turn of the twentieth century, it was until the late 1930s in the Red Hills region that it became commercially significant. The earliest reference I found of Herbert Stoddard and his tung grove is 1940, in *Birds of Grady County, Georgia*. (See page 144, his species account for Grasshopper Sparrows.) Since it takes five years for tung trees to mature, Stoddard probably planted his grove in the mid-1930s.

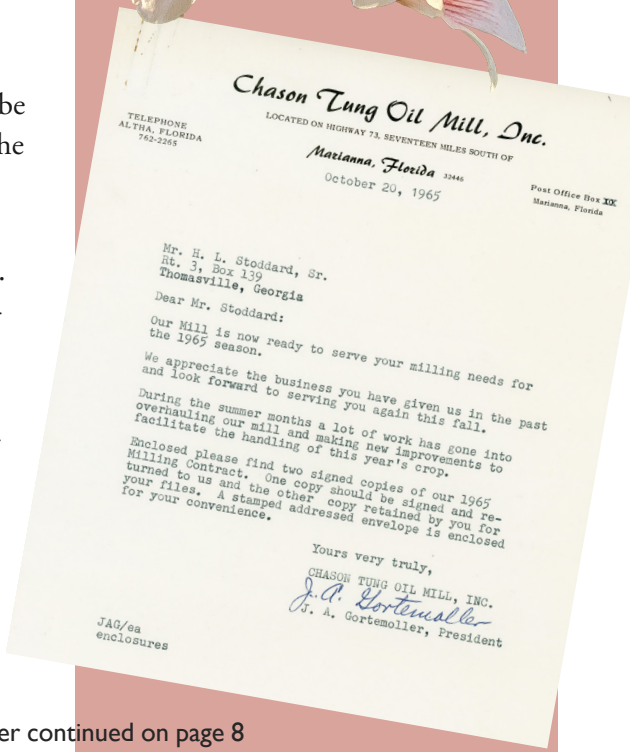
A letter he wrote to the Cooperative Quail Association members with secretary Henry Beadel, on April 15, 1943, states that the Association would be disbanded on May 1 of that year. Several reasons for this action were given. The third reason states:

> We, who are carrying on the work of the Association feel impelled to devote our time and energies to essential work during these trouble times. Stoddard has planned to devote his time during the War to assisting nearby preserve owners in their timbering programs, and to attending to his Tung oil groves and farm...

When doing research for this article, I checked with Juanita Whiddon, the archivist at Tall Timbers, to see what she could find out about Stoddard and his Tung grove. She looked in the Stoddard Collection for any records and found a manila folder titled "Tung" in Stoddard's handwriting. Inside the folder Stoddard had placed correspondense with tung oil mills, receipts for tung nut processing, brochures from the American Tung Oil Association, a 1957 farmer's bulletin on tung production from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other memorabilia. What a find!






Chason Tung Oil Mill, Inc.
LOCATED ON HIGHWAY 73, SEVENTEEN MILES SOUTH OF
Marianna, Florida 32446
TELEPHONE ALTHA, FLORIDA 762-3265
Post Office Box XX Marianna, Florida
October 20, 1965

Mr. H. L. Stoddard, Sr.
Rt. 3, Box 139
Thomasville, Georgia

Dear Mr. Stoddard:

Our Mill is now ready to serve your milling needs for the 1965 season.

We appreciate the business you have given us in the past and look forward to serving you again this fall.

During the summer months a lot of work has gone into overhauling our mill and making new improvements to facilitate the handling of this year's crop.

Enclosed please find two signed copies of our 1965 Milling Contract. One copy should be signed and returned to us and the other copy retained by you for your files. A stamped addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

Yours very truly,
CHASON TUNG OIL MILL, INC.
J. A. Gortemoller, President

JAG/ea
enclosures

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Birds of Grady County and Herbert Stoddard's Tung Groves

In *Birds of Grady County, Georgia*, Herbert Stoddard makes several references in his bird observations to his tung groves. The manuscript was found among Stoddard's papers after his death in 1970, and was published by Tall Timbers as Bulletin No. 21 in July 1978. It was edited by Roy Komarek and Robert L. Crawford, who state in the Editors' Introduction that Stoddard's manuscript was written in longhand, with no introduction or bibliography. They included other notes and annotations by Stoddard they found in his papers for the book's publication.

Here are excerpts from Stoddard's species accounts in *Birds of Grady County, Georgia,* with references to his tung groves.

Blue Grosbeak. ... the Blue Grosbeaks have almost deserted the brushy spots in the open pine woods on Sherwood and now concentrate their breeding activities in the tung oil groves. Here the lightly constructed, rather deep nests are built and lined with grasses and rootlets, usually being placed from 5 to 15 feet up in the tung trees. A pair of Grosbeaks per about 3 acres of grove approximates the breeding density in this type of habitat. These birds have increased manyfold [sic] since tung groves have been expanded to a size that makes them attractive for nesting. ... A typical nest with 3 eggs, located about 6 feet up in a tung tree, was found 9 June 1947. Young grosbeaks just out of the next but still dependent on their parents for food were common in the tung groves during mid-August. I observed a female feeding full developed young on 20 August 1942 and 2 others carrying worms into dense tung trees where young were undoubtedly concealed by the foliage. Blue Grosbeaks find an abundance of insects on the leguminous cover crops grown for soil improvement in the tung groves....

Above, center, is a watercolor of Blue Grosbeaks painted at Sherwood Plantation in 1952, by George M. Sutton for the book ***Georgia Birds*** by Thomas Burleigh, published in 1958. Herbert Stoddard hosted Sutton at Sherwood while he drew and painted birds. Sutton was a renowned bird artist and ornithologist. In his essay on the color plates for the book, Sutton mentions being driven all over Sherwood and shown the tung orchards.



"Blue Grosbeaks lived in scattered pairs in thicket-dotted openings in the forest. I found one nest low among the outer branches of a tung tree...." — George M. Sutton

Eastern Wood Pewee. ... As noted elsewhere pewees sometimes found it profitable to follow me up one row and down another in the tung groves, catching insects I disturbed as I worked. This behavior, which occurred during the summer months, was similar to that of the phoebe during the winter. As I worked in a tung grove in late afternoon of 15 May 1958, yellow-green deer flies began annoying me. Only one or two were buzzing around my head at first, but they were quick as a flash and seldom were caught by my slapping hand. Suddenly a wood pewee darted within inches of my eyes 2 or 2 times before I realized what was happening. He was following my slow forward progress, and soon I noticed that at every dart he made toward my head there was one less deer fly. He never seemed to miss! ...

Eastern Phoebe. ... An interesting behavior of the phoebe is quoted from my notes of 13 December 1955:

> The week of 6-13 December was a bitter cold one for southwest Georgia, with temperatures near or below freezing during the night and cold 15-30 m.p.h. northwest winds blowing during daylight hours, sometimes into the night. I worked afternoons pruning limbs in one of Sherwood's tung groves in the winter territory of a phoebe who was having a hard time making a living — few insects were flying. Early afternoons as I started my work, the phoebe joined me, perch to perch only a few feet distant as I worked down the rows. He would sally forth and catch insects disturbed by my chopping. Occasionally, as the wind lulled, I would note a few dancing swarms of tiny insect in the air. At such time the bird left me and fed on them. But when the wind blew hardest with lowered temperatures because of clouds, he followed me faithfully and caught the few insects disturbed by my activity. I have frequently noted this habit of the phoebe when pruning my tung groves in severe winter weather, but never has one accompanied me so long and closely. ...

Indigo Bunting. ... This species has during recent years "taken over" the tung groves on Sherwood for breeding (although the "natural" location is shrubby growth on field edges and in the open piney woods). When the leaves drop in the fall, we find 2 or 3 to half a dozen of the characteristic nest in each grove. This, coupled with observations on the singing males, is the basis of our estimate of a maximum nesting population of one breeding pair to each 2 or 3 acres of grove. As there are 13 of the groves totaling some 125 acres, a considerable breeding population is indicated. Very few pairs, however, continue to nest in the open piney woods on the place to which they were largely confined as breeders before the tung groves were planted. On 20 July 1940, a nest with 3 eggs was noted near the end of a tung branch not over 18 inches above the ground. The more usual situation in tung trees is from 5 to 15 feet up....

Grasshopper Sparrow. ... Winter records include 2 seen while disking tung groves on Sherwood, 6 December 1941, and a specimen collected in another tung grove on 4 February 1940. Many others have been observed in the groves at this season.... In Grady County, Grasshopper Sparrows may be found in largely open areas—fields grown up to rank broomsedge, grassy pastures, and the scant grassy spots between trees in tung and pecan groves. ...

Why Tung Groves on Sherwood?

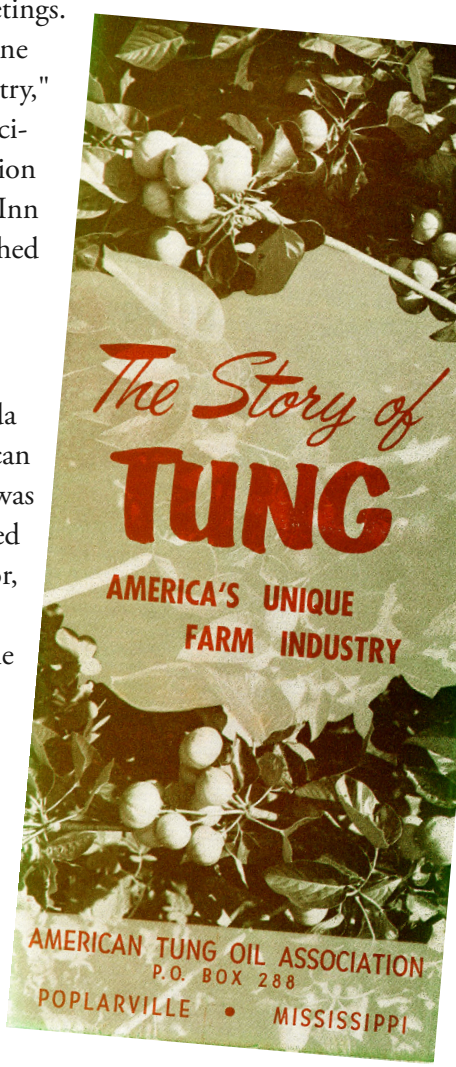
According to a brochure produced by the American Tung Oil Association, growing tung trees for oil was undertaken to provide an agricultural industry for the cut-over pine area of the lower Gulf States, an area then underdeveloped and much better suited to tung production than to growing cotton.

During the Great Depression, the tung industry provided much needed work and there was a demand for the oil by the paint and varnish manufacturers, which was becoming hard to import from China thanks to Japanese aggression prior to World War II.

Enthusiasm was high for the tung industry in north Florida and south Georgia, as well as the rest of the Tung Belt states during these years. Herbert Stoddard jumped on the "tung tree band wagon" and planted tung groves at this time. Stoddard also grazed cattle on his Sherwood Plantation. Cattle grazing in tung groves was common as tung and livestock proved to be compatible. As previously noted, Stoddard tended to his tung groves during the war years and continued until the mid-1960s.

In Stoddard's Tung folder, I found correspondence beginning in 1952. It was a letter from John Watts the editor and publisher of Tung World, a monthly review of the tung oil industry thanking Stoddard for renewing his subscription. Stoddard replied thanking Mr. Watts for the TUNGOLIN that he was trying out on various minor skin troubles, and enclosed a check in the amount of $1.25 for payment.

There were many letters between Stoddard and the American Tung Association regarding his membership dues, proxy voting and association meetings. A 1954 letter enclosed two brochures that were attached. One is titled, "The Story of Tung, America's Unique Farm Industry," the other was used as an advertising solicitation for the associations publication, *American Tung News*. There is an invitation to attend a meeting of Florida tung growers at the Holiday Inn in Tallahassee, Florida on July 25, 1963. A program is attached with notes by Stoddard (that I can't decipher) on the back.



Most of the other correspondence is from tung mills. Herbert Stoddard had contracts with American Tung Mills out of Florala, Alabama who also had a mill in Altha, Florida south of Marianna, where his nuts were milled. The American Tung Mills correspondence was from Michael Lisanti who was later found guilty of knowingly selling tung oil that belonged to the federal government. In November 1958, a competitor, Alabama Tung Mills, who was trying to get Stoddard's business, sent Stoddard a copy of an article about it from the *Mobile Register* along with a contract, which wasn't signed. A 1961 copy of the *American Tung News* had an article about a new mill being readied for operation. This was the Chason Tung Oil Mill on Highway 73 near Altha. It was a resurrection of the American Tung Mills, and was the tung mill Stoddard did business with, at least until May 1966. There is a letter, a signed contract (witnessed by Leon and Julie Neel) and a tung nut analysis for moisture and oil. These are the last documents in Stoddard's file folder. ■