

## ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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### Alabama Bird-life

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## THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

The air was blurred with dry leaves flying,  
Gold and scarlet, gaily dying.  
A squirrel ran off with a nut in his mouth,  
And always, always, flying south,  
Twittering, the birds went by,  
Flickering sharp against the sky.

—Teasdale.

As the deep rich color of the autumn trees and the migration of myriad birds are etched in my memory, so are the days of the early beginnings of our organization. Long had there been a desire for such a group in the hearts of many, but each seemed to wait for another to initiate the movement. Early in January, 1952, the impulse came to sound out the few who were reputed to be interested in birds and nature in our state. Letter after letter was sent out to people who should be interested and to people whose names were recommended. Finally, April 15 was chosen for a state meeting. Twenty-two people from over the state met for dinner at Britling's, after a cold, damp field trip to Lake Purdy, and started the organization of the Alabama Ornithological Society. From time to time until now the response and interest have been most gratifying. After about a year and as half, from that small beginning has grown this strong organization of 89 members from all over Alabama and from Tennessee, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Canada.

The group has not only grown in numbers, but in interest, and has worked to bring the lecturer, Charles L. Broley, with his lecture on eagles, in order that there might be funds to publish the first editions of **Alabama Bird-Life**. At least one chapter of the A.O.S. has been organized, the Auburn Bird Club, and soon there are to be others. Congratulations to that most enthusiastic group led by editor, Julian Dusi, and the new director of District 3, Hugh Cunningham! Over a part of the state, there has been participation in field trips, hawk migration studies, swift bandings, and probably other activities not yet reported. The individual members are discussing their parts in promotion of Bird Clubs, keeping records of the arrivals and departures of winter residents, migrants, and recording nesting data. There is a new consciousness, a new enthusiasm for learning to recognize birds and how to attract them!

So, with justifiable pride in the memory of the accomplishments of the past few months, Alabama is on the alert. She has joined the ranks of the enthusiastic bird-lovers over the nation. With this quickened interest will come new knowledge, followed by new

enthusiasm. Someone has aptly stated that riches lie not in what one possesses but in what one appreciates. Alabama is rich in the things of beauty; its birds life is unsurpassed when considered the year-round from north to south. With improved farming, increased forest areas, impounded waterways, and numerous ponds, thus increasing the types of habitats, there have been many changes in the bird population and no doubt the number of species. The future of the A.O.S. in Alabama looks bright, filled with the fun of adventure and discovery. But best of all, the deep peace of the woods, the joy in the simple things, the unsurpassed music of bird songs, the inspiration of rich friendships, the sharing of new and old experiences as this organization grows in deeper appreciation of the beauty of the avian wealth which lies in Alabama. There are great days ahead. Your president is happy to be a part of this organization. With your cooperation and continued support, the Alabama Ornithological Society will move forward in the state and find a place of influence and service.

## NOTES ON BREEDING WATERFOWL OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY IN NORTHERN ALABAMA

By DAVID C. HULSE and THOMAS Z. ATKESON

When you mention nesting ducks in our State, there are two common reactions. Perhaps half of us Alabamians seem to think we have no nesting waterfowl; the other half seem surprised that all species of ducks and geese do not nest here. The truth lies somewhere in between. Certainly we are too far south for any significant waterfowl nesting, but we do have at least some breeding birds.

Our most common nester is the wood duck, breeding throughout the State wherever hollow tree cavities in reasonable proximity to water are found. We know of no way to really estimate the number of wood ducks breeding in our State or the number of young produced, but they must range into the hundreds, perhaps the thousands.

There are at least two other species, mallards and black ducks, that nest rather commonly in the northern third of the State. Hooded mergansers, tree nesters like the wood ducks, may breed throughout the State, most often in the northern part. There are scattered reports of occasional nesting by other species, including blue-wing teal, ringnecks, and gadwalls, but these are exceptional cases and certainly not the rule.

In the Tennessee Valley, where the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintains the 41,000 acre Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge and the Alabama Conservation Department has the Sauty Refuge along with four public hunting areas, some interesting data has been kept on nesting birds. Here, as in other parts of the State, wood ducks are the most common nesters. On Wheeler Refuge about 200 pairs are estimated as the breeding population. Nests with eggs have been seen as early as late February, and the first broods of ducklings have been noted as early as April 13. Ducks with broods of flightless young are usually seen in May and early June and occasionally in July. These broods have numbered up to 14 young, but averaged about nine.

Second most common of the Valley nesters are the mallards. Wheeler Refuge personnel estimated about 25 breeding pairs each spring. Nesting begins in early April and the first broods have been noted on April 24. Broods sighted usually consist of from 7 to 9 ducklings and these have been noted as late as early July.

Somewhat less common than the mallards, as nesters, are the black ducks. On Wheeler Refuge about a dozen pairs are estimated to breed each year. While nesting probably begins earlier in the season than the records indicate, the first nest noted has been on May 1, with the first broods seen on May 13. There are no records of flightless young after June 7. From these

records, broods seem to average about seven ducklings.

While hooded mergansers are definitely nesters, they are never common in summer. On April 19, 1947, Paul Bryan of the T.V.A. Fish and Game Branch, discovered a female incubating a clutch of eggs near Elk River. Wheeler Refuge personnel saw a female with a brood of seven young on April 27, 1940, and a female with a brood of three young May 15, 1952.

While pairs of blue-wing teal have been seen on Wheeler Refuge throughout summer, no young have ever been noted. J. L. Heflin, manager of the Alabama Waterfowl Development Project, reports a female blue-wing with a brood of three flightless young on the Swan Creek Public Hunting Area May 20, 1951. There have been scattered unverified reports of teal nesting in this part of the State and it seems probable that a few pairs breed in Alabama each year.

Although our State is too far south for any large-scale waterfowl nesting and most of our ducks breed far to the north and visit us only during cold weather, we do contribute many young wood ducks and a few mallards and blacks to the continent's waterfowl population. A close watch may reveal more nesting in other localities and by other species. This would be a worthwhile project for the bird student, since we do not know enough about duck nesting at the extreme southern limits of their ranges.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge  
Decatur, Alabama  
Accepted for publication July 1, 1953.

## A SPRING DAY ON THE ALABAMA COAST

By HENRY M. STEVENSON

No observer familiar with the Red-eyed Vireo or the Wood Thrush on its breeding grounds would expect to find it or other arboreal species among the sand dunes of the Alabama coast, but one of the interesting phenomena associated with migration is the occurrence of birds in most unusual habitats. In order to experience this phenomenon, however, the observer will need to visit the coast only when the weather conditions are favorable. The word "favorable" is not used here to imply suitability for picnics, swimming, or most other human activities, but favorable to the grounding of birds which would otherwise pass over the coastal region and continue into more congenial habitat. Two kinds of weather are "favorable": rainy and cold. (A combination of the two, of course, is better still.) Cold weather, at least in spring, is always accompanied by more or less northerly winds; that is, headwinds for birds flying more or less northward. Under these circumstances, most migrating birds land at the first opportunity. If they are flying over some part of the Gulf of Mexico, this first opportunity will be very near the coastline. Consequently such inclement weather, especially over a period of several days, usually results in an accumulation of many migratory land birds in the coastal woods, whereas a visit there in dry, warm weather would reveal the presence of very few of the same species.

Among the field trips I have made on the Alabama coast in spring, one in particular stands out in many respects as the most remarkable migration I have ever witnessed. The date was April 26, 1952. Just prior to this date a cold front had swept over most of the South, and throughout the day of the 26th a north-west wind estimated at 10 to 20 miles per hour prevailed. The temperature ranged from about 58° to 74°. Starting from Elberta, in Baldwin County, I drove to Foley, then down the Gulf highway, turned east at the canal to Orange Beach and Bear Point, then turned back west to Fort Morgan. Stops were made in the various types of habitat which may be found there. After some 10½ hours of counting birds I returned to compile the totals and learned that 109 species had been recorded and about 1,006 individual birds. Although the complete list will not be given, comments on some of the more interesting species and on omissions from the list seem in order.

**WATER BIRDS:** White Pelicans, seldom seen on the Alabama coast, were found flying over Bear Point and resting on the beach at Fort Morgan, these two flocks totaling about 40 individuals. Only four members of the family Ardeidae were found (Great Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Little Blue and Green Herons),

and their numbers were comparatively few. Not a single species of duck was listed, although a more systematic search might have produced Lesser Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser, and Blue-winged Teal.

**MARSH BIRDS:** These birds are comparatively scarce on the Alabama coast, but two Soras, a Purple Gallinule, and a Coot were recorded. The apparent absence of the Clapper Rail was surprising.

**SHORE BIRDS:** In my limited experience, the Alabama coast is inferior in its variety and numbers of shore birds to regions farther east, but on this exceptional day 12 species were found. Except for the 50 Semipalmated Sandpipers, none of these numbered more than 10 individuals. Probably the most unusual for that region were two Hudsonian Curlews, a Pectoral Sandpiper, and a Stilt Sandpiper. Despite this comparatively good list of shore birds, such characteristic species as the Piping, Snowy, and Black-bellied Plovers, and the Red-backed Sandpiper were missed.

**GULLS AND TERNS:** Nine species were recorded, the most unusual of which, by far, was the Roseate Tern. Although I have another sight record of this species on the Alabama coast, it should not be added to the state list until a specimen is collected, because of the difficulty of separating it from other members of its genus.

**RAPTORIAL BIRDS:** This group was very poorly represented. Two species found were hardly surprises—the Osprey and the Broad-winged Hawk (which apparently nests at Bear Point). The third a, Pigeon Hawk at Fort Morgan, was one of the better records of the day. No other species of hawk, no owls, and no vultures were recorded, although a more thorough coverage of inland areas might have partly closed these gaps.

**LAND BIRDS, LOWER ORDERS:** Numerically outstanding among these species were 21 Yellow-billed Cuckoos and nine Ruby-throated Hummingbirds—far more of either species than one could find on a given day in summer. The nocturnal Chuck-will's-widow and the uncommon Ground Dove were missed.

**WOODPECKERS:** Here again there were some surprising omissions—the Pileated, Red-headed, Downy, and Red-cockaded, all of which should have been found in a more comprehensive search. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, however, is seldom found so late in spring.

**FLYCATCHERS:** Several Crested Flycatchers and a single Wood Pewee were recorded, but the feature of this family was the Eastern Kingbird. It was literally everywhere, and my estimated total of 55 individuals is extremely conservative. That many of these were migrants is indicated by the fact that along this same strip about six weeks later only four Kingbirds were found.

**SWALLOWS:** The results here were disappointing, especially the omission of the Rough-wing, which nests near the Alabama coast. Fair numbers of Barn Swallows (which nest at Fort Morgan) and Purple Martins were found, but otherwise the list came to a single Bank Swallow coursing over the airport at Fort Morgan.

**SEDENTARY LAND BIRDS:** Among the conspicuous omissions were the American (Common) Crow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Long-billed Marsh Wren. None of the species which were found were listed in unusual numbers.

**MISCELLANEOUS MIGRATORY LAND BIRDS:** A single House Wren was rather late (although another was seen the next day), but some other winter residents in this group had apparently left: Short-billed Marsh Wren, both kinglets, and American Pipit. As to numbers, the 26 Catbirds were remarkable, as the species does not breed on the Alabama coast and only a few winter there.

**THRUSHES:** From a quantitative point of view, these birds might be considered the event of the day. In the woods, in the scrub covering the sand dunes, and even in the oldeanders and prickly ash (*Xanthoxylum*) at Fort Morgan, thrushes seemed to be flying around continuously. Because of my efforts to avoid duplication, plus the difficulty of identifying every individual Olive-backed or Gray-checked, I feel sure that my numbers are much too conservative, but even so they are extremely high in my experience with these birds. The list showed about 22 Veeries, 12 Olive-backs, 12 Gray-cheeks, and 11 Wood Thrushes. Evidently all Hermit Thrushes had departed, as was also true of the Robin.

**VIREOS:** Only the wintering Solitary (Blue-headed) Vireo was missed. Numbers of White-eyed Vireos were moderate, and only one Yellow-throated Vireo was found, but Red-eyes were abundant (45). It seemed incongruous to find them foraging in scrub live oaks less than two feet high. Over much the same route on June 14, only four Red-eyed Vireos could be found.

**WARBLERS:** Although my list of 19 species looked good by coastal standards, it actually represented just a little more than half the "possible" number. Quantitatively, the Tennessee Warbler stood out at 18 individuals, outnumbering even the wintering and summering species. Those which are thought to be most unusual for the Alabama coast were: five Cape Mays, two Blackpolls, and two Prairies. One or two of the Ovenbirds at Fort Morgan were walking around **inside** the fort. Among the more notable omissions might be mentioned the Worm-eating, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Magnolia, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, and Kentucky Warblers, and Louisiana Water-thrush.

**BLACKBIRDS, ORIOLES, AND TANAGERS:** Some members of these groups were among the most abundant species of the day, for example: Bobolink, 30; Orchard Oriole, 25; Scarlet Tanager, 27; Summer Tanager, 14. (It goes without saying that the resident Red-wing and Grackle were also well up the list.) The sight of three or four male Scarlet Tanagers perched in a single dead bush on a sand dune is as indescribable as it is unbelievable. The Baltimore Oriole was comparatively scarce, only two being found.

**FINCHES AND SPARROWS:** The family Fringillidae accounted for only nine of the species seen. The most numerous of these (omitting resident forms) were the Indigo Bunting, 35, and the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 17. Also present were a few Grosbeaks and a single female Painted Bunting. More thorough coverage might have produced the following additional members of this family: Sharp-tailed, Seaside, Pine-woods, and Chipping Sparrows.

If there is a moral to this rambling account, it is the great variety of birds which may be encountered in a good spring day on the Alabama coast. On the day mentioned a really thorough coverage of southern Baldwin County might have produced 150 species. Undoubtedly such days have often occurred before and will come again. If a group of Alabama ornithologists would care to spend a day in late April or early May making an exhaustive census of the bird life of this region—an undertaking which would require four or five field parties at least—I should be pleased to take part in the project if by any means possible.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON ALABAMA'S BREEDING BIRDS

By HENRY M. STEVENSON

The highly informative article on the distribution of breeding birds in Alabama by Tom Imhof got a new journal off to a good start. So far as I am aware, this account left little to be desired, but after a thorough reading a few added comments seemed in order. The responsibility for these short-comings, if they be so considered, is assumed entirely by the present writer, who had opportunity to transmit all of his records and ideas to Imhof at an earlier date, but overlooked a few points in doing so. It is with the hope of setting the record straight on these few points that I comment on Imhof's account of the following species:

**RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER.** Among the few records in extreme northern Alabama is one of a bird seen just west of Guntersville, June 22, 1945. It seems odd that this southern species extends its range northward into Tennessee and Kentucky at fairly high altitudes, but usually only where pines are present. Its continued presence on Sand Mountain is a point which should be checked, as the top of this plateau is largely deforested today.

**PRAIRIE HORNED LARK.** To the stated habitat preference for "open, short-grass areas" should be added one for cotton fields, in which environment the Red Bay record was made, as well as some Tennessee records.

**AMERICAN ROBIN.** The statement that "in 1943 it could not be found in southeast Alabama below Auburn," if it has reference to a trip I made at that time, should be qualified, as I am by no means certain that the species was absent there at the time. The trip was made in August, at which time Robins may be less conspicuous than in early summer; furthermore, any search for birds was incidental to the chief purpose of this trip. Certainly the species should be searched for now in Troy, Ozark, and many other towns in south Alabama.

**BLUE GROSBEAK:** In addition to the most northern localities mentioned in connection with this species (Sand Mountain and Decatur) should be added Guntersville, Florence, and Red Bay, where the species occurs in June. Small numbers were recorded at the first two of these localities but at Red Bay Grosbeaks were actually common.

Literature cited: IMHOFF, T. A., 1953, Our Present Knowledge of Alabama's Breeding Birds. *Alabama Bird-Life*, 1(1-2):2-9.

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## FLORIDA GALLINULES NEST NEAR AUBURN

On June 4, 1953, a friend and I found the nest of a Florida gallinule, *Gallinula chloropus cachinnans*, near the Beauregard Community, Lee County, in a cove of Lynch Whatley's lake. The water was about one foot deep, and we were poling a boat near some grass when I happened to see an egg lying in the weeds. There seemed to be no nest there, but on closer examination I made out the rough outline of the nest.

The nest was revisited on June 7, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 18. On June 10, there were six eggs in the nest and this was the full clutch. Some work had been done on the nest, and it was a cup-shaped affair about 8 inches in diameter and about 3 inches above the water. The eggs measured an average of 44 by 32 millimeters and were buff colored with various sizes of brown dots. The nest was built entirely of dead weeds and grasses and built in a clump of grass surrounded by small willow trees.

The female was seen only once and the male was never seen. The water level was lowered in the lake, and the female evidently abandoned the nest because, on the last three times I checked the nest, the eggs were cold and the female was not seen.

Discussions with local ornithologists and biologists indicated that this bird is an extremely rare breeder and that this constitutes the first breeding record for Lee County.—William Helms.

## BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS

On May 11, 1952, four male black-bellied plovers, *Squatarola squatarola*, in their black breeding plumage were seen resting on some pilings in the edge of Guntersville Lake about 4 p. m. in the afternoon. These were carefully observed for several minutes with binoculars. Peterson lists this species as migrants in eastern North America. Howell mentions it as common on the coast but rarely found inland. Alabama has been changed so much internally by the impounding of water ways and construction of ponds that variations are to be looked for in the bird population and also in the migration routes.—Blanche Chapman, Ruth Schumacher, Blanche Dean, Kathleen Landes, Birmingham, Alabama.

## FALL OBSERVATIONS, 1953

The French Mulberry, *Callicarpa americana* L., seems to have an especial attraction for birds. From the time the berries began turning violet color in September and October until all have been consumed, a constant line of bird traffic in regular peck order at the shrubs in our yard is to be expected. The mocking birds keep steady watch over the ripening berries, but other regular visitors manage a feast each day. Towhees, field, chipping, and English sparrows, goldfinches, jays, doves, and starlings, and robins are among these. On September 23, 28, and October 4, from three to five female summer tanagers, and on October 1, three female scarlet tanagers were observed feeding on the berries. The yellow-throated and white-eyed vireos, the yellow-breasted chat, pine warbler, wood pewee, and crested flycatchers also pay visits to the bushes, probably seeking insects. Observations show that the blue birds, Carolina wrens, tufted titmice, chickadees, brown-headed and white-breasted nuthatches, and flickers visit the *Callicarpa*, but as far as I can observe, I do not believe they eat the berries. They are possibly curious about what attracts the other species. A total of 25 species was observed this fall on the shrubs.—Lillian Gatchell and Blanche E. Dean, Birmingham, Alabama.

### SCARLET TANAGERS

The scarlet tanagers nested at my home on the Gordon Place, seven miles north of Goodwater, Alabama, in the spring of 1938. This is on the very southern edge of Clay County and must be near the edge of its range for nesting. We have moved from this place, so I am not certain whether it has continued to nest there for the past few years.—Eulalia Johnson, Goodwater, Alabama.

### THE GREAT HORNED OWL

The great horned owl was seen many times last year back of my home which is within the Birmingham city limits. A pair would come and sit in a dead pine and hoot. This year on October 11, the pair was back. Some interested observer should be able to find the nest near by.—Elizabeth Eddy, Birmingham, Alaabama.

## EDITORIAL OBSERVATIONS

The scientific publication of our society, *Alabama Bird-Life*, was established in order that we might be able to publish authentic scientific articles and field notes pertaining to the ornithology of Alabama and to publish articles furthering education in ornithology. The founders of our society felt that this would be a very desirable means of consolidating information of interest to the ornithologists of Alabama and that it would likewise be a service to them as a means of quickly publishing the articles they would submit. This would be a great advantage to them because most scientific publications have a delay period in publishing of at least a year. *Alabama Bird-Life* could publish their articles within three to six months.

Two disturbing factors affect the proper functioning of the publication: a scarcity of funds and a paucity of material to print. By carefully using our money and by additional efforts to secure funds, the first problem can be fairly well controlled as long as we apply ourselves. The scarcity of material to print most greatly concerns your editor, because the reason for having a publication is to provide an outlet for ornithological articles. If they are not submitted, then the need for such a journal ceases.

There is, however, a wealth of ornithological information to be published for this state, but only a few people seem interested in reporting their findings. Our first issue of *Alabama Bird-Life* contains some very basic information regarding the breeding birds of Alabama. Mr. Imhoff has given us a starting point from which to work. If each of us would carefully examine this article and then see whether he already has additional records to contribute, or could do some field work to establish new information, he could build on this basic information and make more complete our total knowledge of the breeding birds. Many of us have records of bird migrations or are in the process of collecting new ones. Unusual records make good field notes. Migration records from one or a number of spring or fall seasons make desirable articles. These would be extremely helpful in making the patterns and paths of migrations better understood.

At this time of year one might make an interesting study of the winter residents of an area. Many can be seen in our yards and fairly near our homes. If a whole local group would work together and pool their information, much could be learned in a season. This could be published as a short article, or several seasons' data could be compiled into a more comprehensive paper.

These are but a few suggestions as to how much good data about our birds may be secured and how your editor's problems of

obtaining material to print can be solved. We all enjoy studying birds and by a little planning can extend our enjoyment to others by publishing our findings so that all can read them.

## EDITORIAL POLICY OF ALABAMA BIRD-LIFE

The editorial policy of **Alabama Bird-Life** is to publish authentic scientific articles and field reports pertaining to Alabama ornithology and to publish articles furthering education in ornithology.

To be acceptable, manuscripts should be written in a direct, clear, concise style. Refer to past issues for examples. If references are made in the text, they should be cited at the end of the article in alphabetical order; for example:

### Text—

By careful reference to his field guide (Peterson, 1947), the writer was able to identify the birds. They were trapped by Kutz, 1945, method.

### Citations—

KUTZ, H. L., 1945, An improved game bird trap. *Journ. Wildl. Mgt.*, 9(1):35-38.

PETERSON, R. T., 1947, A field guide to the birds. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, pp. 290.

The authenticity of records is of outstanding importance. Do not submit records which are uncertain. Any unusual record should be verified by the observation by a reliable ornithologist and preferably by the collection of the specimen by an authorized person. For unusual records, state clearly the circumstances under which the bird was observed and by whom and, if collected, where the specimen is placed.

Submit manuscripts to the editor typed on one side only, on unlined 8½" x 11" paper, double spaced (tables included). Omit tables wherever possible. Photographs and drawings will be published only at the author's expense.