

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPERS, NORTHERN PHALAROPE, RUDDY TURNSTONES,
GULL-BILLED TERNS AND STILT SANDPIPERS AT MARION FISH HATCHERY

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Five noteworthy observations were made at Marion Fish Hatchery 5 miles north of Marion, Perry County, Alabama, on 17 and 18 May 1969 between 5:15 P.M. and 8:15 P.M. C.D.T. on the 17th and between 12:00 P.M. and 3:00 P.M. C.D.T. on the 18th. Four of these species were seen for the first time in inland Alabama in the spring. Two Ruddy Turnstones (Arenaria interpres) on 17 May, sixteen White-rumped Sandpipers (Erolia fuscicollis) on 17 May, thirty-two Stilt Sandpipers (Micropalama himantopus) on 18 May, one Northern Phalarope (Lobipes lobatus) on 17 May, and two Gull-billed Terns (Gelochelidon nilotica) were observed on 17 May. There had been several days of heavy rain, thunderstorms and high winds from the southeast. Climatological data from Montgomery, the closest station, showed that from 14 May through 17 May there was almost 100% cloud cover. Further, the precipitation from 14 May through 18 May totaled 78.6% of the total rainfall for the month. During our observations on the 17th, skies were overcast with intermittent heavy rain, but were clear at noon on the 18th. Various power binoculars were used on all species and a 15X-60X Bausch and Lomb scope on all except the Ruddy Turnstones. The species are described in the order that they were found.

White-rumped Sandpipers

The 16 White-rumps were first noticed flying in a tight flock over one of the partially filled ponds. They circled over it several times and then landed on the mud flat and began to feed along the edge of the water. In flight, their white rumps and broad tail bands were clearly evident. Standing, their bodies were slender and elongated with fine streaking coming down the sides. The White-rumps were slightly bigger in comparison with Semipalmated Sandpipers (Ereunetus psuillus) that were feeding on the same mud flat. However, it was found through our two days of observations that the only way to identify these similar plumaged birds was by flushing them and seeing the rump and tail pattern. The White-rumps gave loud, noisy calls both sitting and flying. White-rumped Sandpipers are becoming almost an annual late spring migrant at the hatchery. Reid et. al. (Flicker Flashes, 21:2) saw 17 on 1 and 9 June 1969 and a pair on 16 June. Only two birds were seen on 18 May and none on a subsequent trip on 28 May.

Northern Phalarope

The Northern Phalarope was flushed from the bank of a filled pond and flew 50 feet over it. It then dropped onto the water and did a half spin. At first it was thought to be a sandpiper due to the white wing stripe in flight, but when it dropped onto the water the identification was certainly a phalarope. It was changing into summer plumage and showed a reddish brown coming down the side of the neck and a white throat. There was splotched gray on the breast that continued down the sides. The back was a dark gray with yellow-brown stripes on it that could be seen both in flight and swimming. The bill was black, long, slender, needle-like and slightly longer than the head. The bird was observed for 30 minutes from a distance of 50 feet up to 12 feet as it swam and fed in the pond. The Northern Phalarope was separated from the Wilson's Phalarope (Steganopus tricolor) by the flight pattern and from the Red Phalarope (Phalaropus Fulicarius) by the back and breast coloration. The sex could not be determined due to the changing plumage. Identifiable photographs were made. This is the fifth state record and first spring record. There were two birds in the Tennessee Valley 13 October 1949 and one bird 9 October 1954 at Lakeland Farm, Marion (Alabama Birds, 1962, Imhof, p. 265). Also, one at Anniston 11 and 12 November 1963 and one 27 August 1964 at Dauphin Island (Imhof, personal communication).

Ruddy Turnstones

Two Ruddy Turnstones were seen flying fast toward us over the ponds of the hatchery in an erratic twisting and turning flight pattern. They were in spring plumage and showed brown and white swirled backs with black markings coming down the side of the face. They did not stop in our vicinity and could not be located on any of the ponds. The birds were observed for only 30 seconds, but the spring flight plumage of Ruddy Turnstones is unmistakable and our experience with this species on the Gulf Coast enabled us to identify them immediately. This is the first Upper Coastal Plain record and the first spring inland record (Alabama Birds, p. 231).

Gull-billed Terns

The two Gull-billed Terns were sitting on a mud flat in a practically filled pond. This pond had been checked thirty minutes before and the terns were not present. Immediately, it was noticed that the terns had thick black bills and black caps that layed down and extended to the bill and part way down the back of the neck. The

terns were white with a light gray color on the back. When flushed they were observed not to have a forked tail, but only a slight dip in it. Standing, they reminded us of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) that we have seen on the coast. The Gull-billed and the Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) are the only two species of terns that have a thick bill and an unforked tail. Therefore, the size between the two would separate the species if a great underestimate in size was not made. This is the first inland record for this species. Imhof says, "It is an uncommon summer resident on the Gulf Coast, and it breeds in southern Mobile County" (*Alabama Birds*, p. 275). Therefore, Gull-billed Terns outside of the coastal area would be rare, but a careful study was made of the birds and many books explored for descriptions of them and we feel that it is a correct identification.

Stilt Sandpipers

On 18 May 32 Stilt Sandpipers were observed first by Jack Carusos and Andy Bates and then found by Harriett Wright, Ricky Kittinger, Ronnie Kittinger, Bob Reid and Mike Bierly. The birds were in the same pond that the Gull-billed Terns had been observed the previous day. The Stilt Sandpipers were in spring plumage with a reddish brown eye stripe and crown stripes, and heavy barring on the breast. The legs were greenish-yellow. The birds were evidently very tired as one flew in to land on the mud flat, hit it and just lay there with its left wing extended. Two others were observed to be just sitting in the water. The rest were busily feeding, some emerged up to their bellies. The feeding was by constant probing into the water and on the mud flat. Several times it was observed that the birds were completely submerged when probing. After about an hour they slowed down and most went to sleep. Photographs were secured by Harriett Wright. This is the second Upper Coastal Plain record and the first spring inland record (*Alabama Birds*, p. 254).

The foregoing is a description of observations at Marion Fish Hatchery on 17 and 18 May 1969. The unusual and violent weather probably accounted for the presence of these birds at the hatchery. It seemed as if we were birding on the Gulf Coast instead of the Upper Coastal Plain and will probably have to go a long time before such a group of birds out of normal terrain will be seen again.

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MINUTES OF SPRING MEETING ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY APRIL 11-13, 1969

The regular spring meeting of AOS was held the week-end of April 11-13, 1969. Dauphin Island, with headquarters at Storey Apartments. Members and visitors from many states, the farthest being Maine, were present.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING

The Executive Council meeting was held during lunch at Le Moyne Restaurant and called to order by Helen Kittinger, President. The following officers and directors were present: Helen Kittinger, Clara Caffee, Sybil Hanks, Idalene Snead, Tom Imhof, Jim Keeler, Dr. Gaillard, Bob Reid, Harriet Wright, Mary Burks, Bernice Smalley, and Mr. John Anderson of National Audubon Society from Sharon, Connecticut.

The Secretary read the minutes which were approved after a minor correction.

Sybil Hanks, the Treasurer, read the annual financial report for the period from April 20, 1968, to April 12, 1969, stating that there was a balance of \$833.07 in the treasury.

Reports from the various regions and committees are as follows:

State-at-Large

Tom Imhof asked that news items be sent in while they are still news. Send in arrival dates so that Tom can have a complete picture of the different arrivals over the state and this information can be put in *Alabama Birdlife*. Tom also told of Mr. Weston's death in Florida.

Gulf Coast Region

Dr. William Gaillard told about the problems on which he is working through several organizations including the Mobile Bird Club, AOS, and Alabama Wildlife Federation. Some interests are wanting to subdivide about 164 acres which are now set aside for birdlife. In order to avert this, some sort of development must be done on the land, such as planting food patches. Dr. Gaillard suggested that for each copy of "Moving the Earth for a Song" sold by Alabama Federation of Wildlife he would contribute one dollar to be put in a general fund to be used for averting the loss of some of the Dauphin Island area. A motion was made by Bernice Smalley