

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE



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THE SEASON, SUMMER-FALL

June through November, 1977

Thomas A. Imhof

In Alabama, the very cold winter was followed by a warm and damp spring, then a dry summer. On the coast, this drought was quite severe until finally broken about August 1, but low water continued in Mobile Bay, and shorebirds and other water birds there were way out on the flats and difficult to identify. Around Birmingham, the shortage of water seemed rather a matter of the local supply falling behind the demand for Lake Purdy water. While many were complaining of the shortage of water, the weather bureau was reporting the annual rainfall close to normal - apparently we cannot store water during period of excess. Then along came tropical storm Babe whose Labor Day deluge brought on wetter weather. September and October, normally our two driest months, were wet enough, so that by the end of period on November 30, we had a ten-inch excess of annual rainfall. Temperatures were moderate so that, in spite of the very cold January, we averaged more than half a degree per day above normal temperature.

Fall migration appeared to be a bit early and rather dull with few concentrations - warblers and flycatchers especially were often poorly represented on local lists. Lib Toenes labelled September on Dauphin the "worst in my memory," and the Birmingham Fall Count produced a record low of only 107 species on September 24 - in 1976 on September 25 we got a record 130! On July 31, two observers (TAI, MN) in spite of losing at least six species in drought-breaking rains at day's end, recorded 114 species coastally. On September 30, two others (JVP, TLW) tallied 135 species on the coast, and so now we have a one-party, one-day list of over 100 species for every month of the year in Alabama. If we can record 129 in February (26, 1975, TAI, HHW, HHK, HBT, ALM) and 135 inland (April 30, 1977, CDC, DMB, SG), and if Fr. Dorn can log 134 alone on a Mobile Christmas Count (December 28, 1959), then we should be able to list over 130 species, one party in one day, in every month of the year in Alabama!

Noteworthy records appear below. If your record is not included, perhaps you forgot to submit a card - or substantiating details. Abbreviations of the four Alabama Bird Regions are: TV - Tennessee Valley, MTR - Mountain Region, ICP - Inland Coastal Plain, GC - Gulf Coast.

Common Loon: June 17, Coden (DB) & Aug. 9, Ft. Morgan (CDC) further evidence of summering annually.

Loon, sp.: Nov. 29, Crow Creek Ref. near Stevenson, a probable Arctic affording less than ideal conditions for identification; small, small-billed and dark-headed, with no noticeable eyering effect, but "we are unwilling to call it" (ALM, HHF).

Horned Grebe: Sept. 10, Guntersville Dam (RWL), earliest Alabama; Sept. 23, Whittaker's Lake, near Huntsville (CDC), would have been earliest TV.

Greater Shearwater: July 26, Aug. 6 & 7, off Dauphin (RWH), 5th summer record.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel: Aug. 6, off Dauphin (RWH), 5th rec for Ala.

White Pelican: June 21, 10, Cochrane Causeway, Mobile (GB), max. this summer.

Brown Pelican: Aug. 3, 95 (47 immature), Fort Morgan (TAI, MN), plus about 100 on Dauphin in late July (LRT) probably means a max. of about 200 this summer. Two birds on Dauphin with a white band on the wing in late July (fide GB) indicate Louisiana origin.

Masked Booby: Aug. 9, Fort Morgan, an immature (CDC), 4th occurrence this year, the 7th consecutive year for Alabama.

Brown Booby: July 17, Dauphin (RWH), 3rd consecutive summer.

Double-crested Cormorant: Aug. 9, 2 plus 12 present remainder of fall, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest inland rec.; Sept. 25, 1, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), earliest TV; Oct. 10, 5, Weiss L. (JVP), earliest Mtr.

GREAT WHITE HERON: Sept. 8, 1 at Lakeland Farm, Marion in direct comparison with blue morphs of the Great Blue and Great Egrets, about 36 hours after passage of tropical storm Babe (HHF, ALM, HHK, SFH), first inland rec. for Alabama and possibly first anywhere inland.

Reddish Egret: Aug. 6, 3, Gulf Shores (JVP), max. for Baldwin County.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron: Oct. 1, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), latest TV.

Least Bittern: Sept. 4, Weiss L. (JF, HHF), latest Mtr.

Wood Stork: Oct. 9, 3, Ashford, Houston Co. (CDD, CDG), only known rec. this summer.

White Ibis: Oct. 27, 5, West Point Res. (JBO), farthest inland and latest this summer.

Whistling Swan: Early Nov., several, Swann Cr., Crow Cr. Ref., Kedstone Ars. (fide TZA) as usual; Nov. 26, an immature, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), 4th rec. ICP.

White-fronted Goose: Nov. 13, 4, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), 7th rec. ICP, 1st in fall.

Black Duck: Sept. 30, 6, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest ICP.

Mottled Duck: July 31, 4, Blakely I. (TAI, MN); Aug. 3, 8, L. Shelby (TAI, MN); Sept. 28, 5, Central Baldwin County (HMS).

Gadwall: Aug. 19, male, Swan Creek (DMB, ALM, HHF).

Pintail: Aug. 22 & 23, female, Swan Creek (CMB, ALM, MMD).

Green-winged Teal: July 18 & Aug. 5, Swan Creek, female (DMB).

Shoveler: July 4, 6 & 11, male, Swan Cr. (DMB); Sept. 2, Decatur (ALM, HHF, MMD); Sept. 5, Marion (ALM), earliest ICP. Last four species late summer recs may be either true summering or early fall migration. Most likely they are hunting season casualties unable to migrate or breed but remaining where conditions are best for survival.

American Wigeon: Sept. 30, 40, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest ICP.

Redhead: Oct. 1, 17, Wheeler Ref. (RWL), earliest inland Alabama.

Ring-necked Duck: male summered at East Lake, Birmingham for 14th consecutive year (RRR, TAI); Nov. 5, 2500+, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), max. for Alabama.

White-winged Scoter: Aug. 24, 2, Dauphin I. (MN), 2nd Aug. rec. Ala.; Nov. 24, 3, on fresh water, L. Shelby (RAD).

Surf Scoter: Nov. 6, female plumage, Raccoon Cr. near Stevenson (DKJ), 3rd for TV, 5th inland, earliest for state.

Red-breasted Merganser: Oct. 17, female, Guntersville (ALM), earliest Ala.

Mississippi Kite: July 14 (TAB) & 30 (TAB, CDC), Wheeler Ref., 4th year of last 10 at Wheeler.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: Oct. 26, 33 and Oct. 27, 50, Fort Morgan (TAI + many), max. for state since 1957; scattered reports throughout state this fall.

Cooper's Hawk: much scarcer than Sharp-shinned but noted at Wheeler Ref., Marshall Co., Birmingham, West Point Res., Fort Morgan & Dauphin I. (mob).

Rough-legged Hawk: Nov. 20, L. Guntersville St. Pk. (CDC), 6th & earliest TV.

Bald Eagle: Aug. 7, 1 and Oct. 30, 2, Eufaula Ref. (JBO); Wheeler Ref., no dates (TZA); L. Guntersville St. Pk., Nov. 20, 2 (CDC, MLB); Oct. 2, Dauphin I. (LRT).

Osprey: fairly regular at Wheeler, Eufaula, and on coast.

Peregrine Falcon: Sept. 25, Oct. 1 & Nov. 12 at Wheeler (RWL, LMB, CDC); Sept. 28 at Dauphin (REH), Oct. 26 at Fort Morgan (TAI).

Merlin: Oct. 24 & 25, Fort Morgan, a female (TAI, others); Oct. 29, Eufaula Ref. (JBO).

Sora: Aug. 22, Swan Cr., 1 (DMB), earliest inland Alabama.

American Coot: two nesting attempts at East L., Birmingham, frustrated by human interference (RRR).

Semipalmated Plover: July 25, 3, L. Purdy (HHK, CDB), earliest Mtr.

Piping Plover: Aug. 8, L. Purdy (RRR), earliest Mtr., others at Purdy, Aug. 15 (same?), Decatur Aug. 23 & 29 (ALM, MMD).

American Golden Plover: Aug. 9, Ft. Morgan, 9 in winter plumage (CDC), earliest Alabama; Oct. 9, Wheeler Ref., 17 (LMB, ALM, RWL), earliest TV exc Aug. 12, 1973.

Common Snipe: July 4 & 6, Swan Cr., 2 & 3 birds (DMB), 2nd time in summer near Decatur.

Whimbrel: Aug. 2, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest inland Alabama, only 2nd away from TV.

Upland Sandpiper: July 1, Wheeler Ref. (DCH), earliest Alabama; Nov. 7, Eufaula Ref. (JLD), latest Alabama.

The Manomet Bird Observatory shorebird study provided local fieldwork this summer by D. Mark Brown at Swan Creek Management Area, Limestone Co., and John and Beverly Winn on Blakely I., Mobile. Shorebirds are strong fliers able to cover long distances over relatively inhospitable terrain. Whenever conditions are right for feeding, large numbers congregate, sometimes even at times of the year when few, if any, are supposed to be passing over. In mid-summer, one often wonders whether the birds are north- or south-bound or just plain summering, so it is important then to note whether the birds are in breeding plumage, for some may take longer than a year to mature. Brown noted that availability of habitat influenced stopovers when he remarked that from Sept. 8 - 24 "while the Tennessee River was being lowered and the 'Dewatering Area' was being flooded, there was no significant shorebird habitat available and no shorebirds were seen!" Ortego noted the same thing at Eufaula Res. both spring and fall - that shorebird numbers "were in part affected by the amount of mudflats exposed."

Spotted Sandpiper: July 4, Swan Cr., 2 (DMB), earliest Alabama.

Solitary Sandpiper: July 1, Swan Cr., 4 (DMB), earliest Alabama.

Red Knot: Aug. 27-30, L. Purdy (CDD, photo-HHK, many), 1st MtR rec., 6th inland fall.

Pectoral Sandpiper: Aug. 5, Eufaula Ref., 281 (JBO), ICP max.

White-rumped Sandpiper: July 11, Swan Cr., 2 (DMB), earliest fall Alabama; Aug. 11, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest ICP.

Least Sandpiper: Oct. 19, Swan Cr., 300+ (DMB), state max.

Dunlin: Oct. 9, Swan Cr. (DMB, ALM, RWL), earliest TV.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: Nov. 5, Swan Cr., 16 (DMB), latest TV (careful identification).

Western Sandpiper: July 24, Lakeland Farms, Marion, 3 (CDD, HME, CWS), earliest ICP.

Sanderling: Nov. 5, Decatur (DMB), latest TV.

Short-billed Dowitcher: July 1, Swan Cr., 2 (DMB), earliest inland Alabama; Nov. 25, Eufaula Ref., 5 (JBO), latest inland Alabama.

Long-billed Dowitcher: July 11, Swan Cr., 2 (DMB), earliest inland Alabama.

Marbled Godwit: July 7, Dauphin (LRT), earliest Alabama; Aug. 8, Ft. Morgan (CDC).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: July 24, L. Purdy (CDD, DWS), earliest Alabama; Aug. 28, Swan Cr., 7 (DMB), max. this fall.

Avocet: July 31, Blakely I., 30+ (TAI, MN), max. of flock present throughout summer; only about 6 with tan heads plus lack of noisiness indicate that the birds did not breed, but the stimulus of closely-related stilts may start a breeding group any year now. Aug. 11, L. Purdy (JVP), earliest inland Alabama; Aug. 19, Swan Cr., 10 (ALM, MMD), earliest TV; Oct. 19, Marion (ALM).

Wilson's Phalarope: Aug. 5 - Sept. 7, Swan Cr., 2-3 (DCH, DMB, Bham mob), earliest and latest TV; Aug. 22, Sand I. (CDD, HME, CDG), 5th fall GC; Aug. 4 and Oct. 23 - Nov 20, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), 2nd & 3rd recs ICP.

Northern Phalarope: Aug. 27-29, Swan Cr. (JRB, JFH, many), 3rd rec TV, 8th inland.

Herring Gull: Oct. 17, Guntersville (ALM), earliest TV.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL: Oct. 24 to at least Nov. 6, Ft. Morgan (RAD, photo-MLM, HHF, mob) an adult in winter plumage with pink legs, carefully identified for first record for Alabama.

Bonaparte's Gull: Oct. 18, Decatur (ALM), earliest TV.

Forster's Tern: June 14 & July 14, Decatur, 3 & 4 birds (DMB), becoming regular in TV in mid-summer.

White-winged Dove: Oct. 30, Ft. Morgan, 5 (RAD, LRD), max. this year.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: Oct. 23, Swan Cr. (DMB), ties latest TV.

Chuck-wills-widow: Oct. 27, Ft. Morgan, 2 females banded (TAI, JAI, RGH), latest Alabama - another female banded there Oct. 24.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: On Dauphin this fall one was seen repeatedly drinking from an alcoholic drink (Bourbon & 7-UP!), fide LRT.

Eastern Kingbird: Sept. 25, Swan Cr. (DMB), latest TV.

Western Kingbird: July 25, Dauphin (RWH), earliest Alabama.

Vermilion Flycatcher: Oct. 18 - Nov. 30, Benton, Lowndes Co., a male (DCH), 4th rec. inland Alabama.

Tree Swallow: Nov. 5, Swan Cr., 8 (DMB), latest TV exc Dec. 8, 1940.

Bank Swallow: July 1, Swan Cr., 2 (DMB), earliest TV but with other mid-summer recs. as in 1955 and 1972 may indicate local breeding; July 24, Marion, 200+ (CDD, HME, CWS), earliest ICP; Aug. 7, Eufaula Ref., 6000 (JBO), max. ICP; July 17, Fairhope, 200+ (A&MN), early build-up consistent with other regions.

Rough-winged Swallow: Aug. 7, Eufaula Ref., 3000 (JBO), max. ICP; Oct. 16, Marion, 3 (ALM), latest ICP.

Barn Swallow: Nov. 5, Swan Cr., 2 (DMB), latest TV. Breeding birds have moved south along I-65 into northeast Baldwin County - nest under culvert in July (JVP, RRR), and occupy as breeders virtually all of Alabama's 67 counties although we lack positive evidence for about 5 of the southeastermost.

Cliff Swallow: July 30, Barlow's Landing, Baldwin Co. (I-65 & Ala. 225), 2 (TAI), earliest GC.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Sept. 12, DeSoto St. Pk. (HHF), earliest inland Alabama, first sign of a good flight year which is materializing.

Gray Catbird: Aug. 3 (TAI, MN) and Aug. 7 (JVP), both Gulf St. Pk. are 30-50 miles south of known breeding range and 6-7 weeks too early for fall migration; Nov. 5, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), latest TV.

Veery: Aug. 22, Swan Cr. (SG), earliest Alabama.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: Oct. 15, Wheeler Ref. (RWL), latest TV.

Yellow-throated Vireo: Oct. 17, Guntersville (ALM), latest TV.

Philadelphia Vireo: Sept. 9, Wheeler Ref. (DMB, JMH), earliest TV; Oct. 18, Decatur (ALM), latest TV.

Tennessee Warbler: Aug. 28, Wheeler Ref., adult (DMB), earliest TV; Nov. 24, Wheeler Ref., immature (DMB), latest TV; Nov. 25, 1 adult, 1 immature, Ft. Morgan (RAD).

Orange-crowned Warbler: Sept. 30, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), earliest TV.

Nashville Warbler: Sept. 1, Birmingham (HHF), earliest Alabama exc Aug. 4, 1976 (Mobile).

N. Parula Warbler: Oct. 22, Wheeler Ref., a male (DMB), latest TV.

Chestnut-sided Warbler: Aug. 19, Wheeler Ref. (CDC, ALM), earliest TV.

Connecticut Warbler: Aug. 23 & 24, Dauphin I. (TAB, JTW, many), earliest Alabama.

Mourning Warbler: Aug. 19, Dauphin I., banded (REH), earliest Alabama.

American Redstart: Oct. 18, Decatur (ALM), latest TV.

Yellow-headed Blackbird: Sept. 23-30, Ft. Morgan, 1-2 (JVP, TLW, others).

Northern Oriole: Nov. 23, Wheeler Ref., female (CDC, JS), latest TV.

Scarlet Tanager: July 4, Tuscaloosa (JCT), species is consistent in summer there.

Indigo Bunting: Nov. 25, Ft. Morgan (RAD), late, but it winters GC.

Dickcissel: Nov. 19, Lakeland Farm, Marion (CDD, HME), one of very few winter recs. ICP.

Evening Grosbeak: Nov. 9, Birmingham (HHF), presages flight year.

Purple Finch: Oct. 29, Wheeler Ref., 20 (DMB), earliest for state exc. MTR.

Pine Siskin: Oct. 29, Wheeler Ref., 12 (DMB), earliest TV.

White-crowned Sparrow: Sept. 20, Dauphin I. (LRT), earliest Alabama.

Song Sparrow: Continues to increase as breeder at Guntersville & Cherokee County, (ALM, TAI, JVP), now singing in Piedmont (CWS).

Lapland Longspur: Nov. 12, Decatur, 46 (DMB, SG), earliest TV.

Observers:

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HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS OF THE UNIONTOWN HERONRY

David F. Werschkul

The purposes of this paper are to (1) report on the status and composition of a large inland heronry located near Uniontown, Perry County, Alabama, (2) present a brief history of heronries in this area, and (3) comment on some conservation measures needed for the management of inland wading bird breeding colonies.

Methods

The Uniontown heronry was visited weekly for 2-day periods between May 5 and July 7, 1977. The physical size of the heronry and nest density were estimated from nest counts and distances on 14 north-south 3-meter wide transect lines spaced every 30 meters. Nesting composition was estimated by recording the relative abundance of each species coming into the heronry for ten 2-minute periods during the hours 1600-1700 on May 24. Information on the location of previous heronries was obtained from interviews of local residents and from Robert R. Reid, Jr., who has been visiting heronries in this area since 1966.

Results

The present site of the heronry is a few kilometers southwest of Uniontown (see Fig. 1) and covers approximately 5.2 hectares with nesting in 2.1 hectares (see Fig. 2). The overstory vegetation is primarily eastern red cedar (Juniperus virginiana) with an occasional (less than 1%) osage orange (Maclura pomifera). The eastern red cedars ranged in height from 1-meter saplings to 11 meters with an average of 8.1 ± 2.8 meters (± 1 S.D.). In those areas where nesting occurred, nest density was fairly uniform (0.78 nests per m²) though higher (1.56 nests per m²) in the western section. The most abundant nesting species was the Cattle Egret (Bubulcus ibis) followed by the White Ibis (Eudocimus ibis), Little Blue Heron (Florida caerulea), Snowy Egret (Leucophoyx thula) and the Great Egret (Casmerodius albus). Table 1 presents the estimates of breeding pairs. This represents an extension of the known Alabama breeding range of the Snowy Egret into the upper coastal plain as recent (post 1955) records are all from the gulf coast region (Imhof 1976). Snowy Egrets have bred in Mississippi near Brooksville, Noxubee Co. (adjacent to Pickens Co., Alabama), since 1972 (Werschkul 1977a). Anhingas (Anhinga anhinga) and Yellow-crowned Night Herons (Nyctanassa violacea) were observed near the heronry, but no nests were seen occupied by either species. Figure 2 shows the nesting area for each species within the heronry.

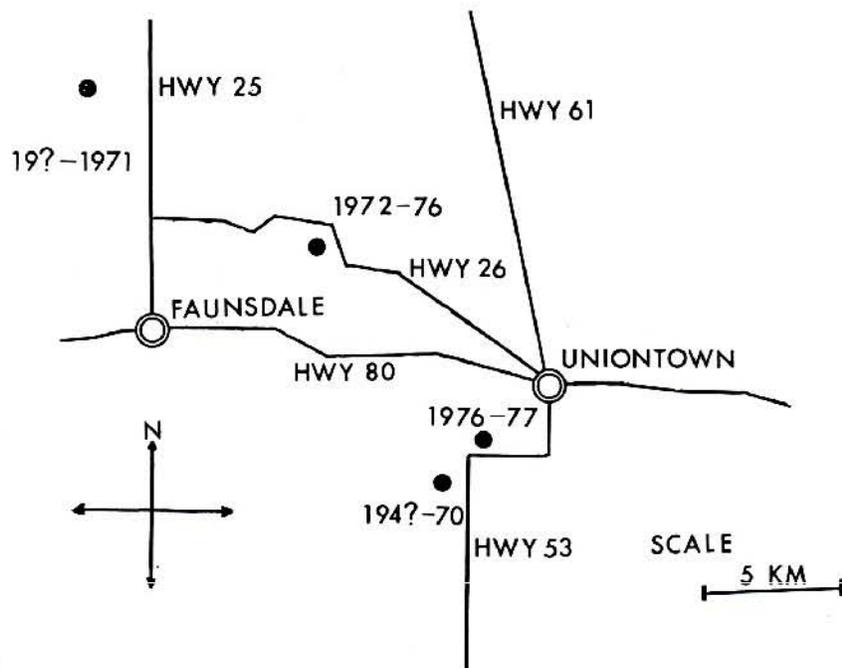


FIGURE 1. Map of Faunsdale-Uniontown area showing the known location of heronries from 1950 to 1970. (● = heronry site).

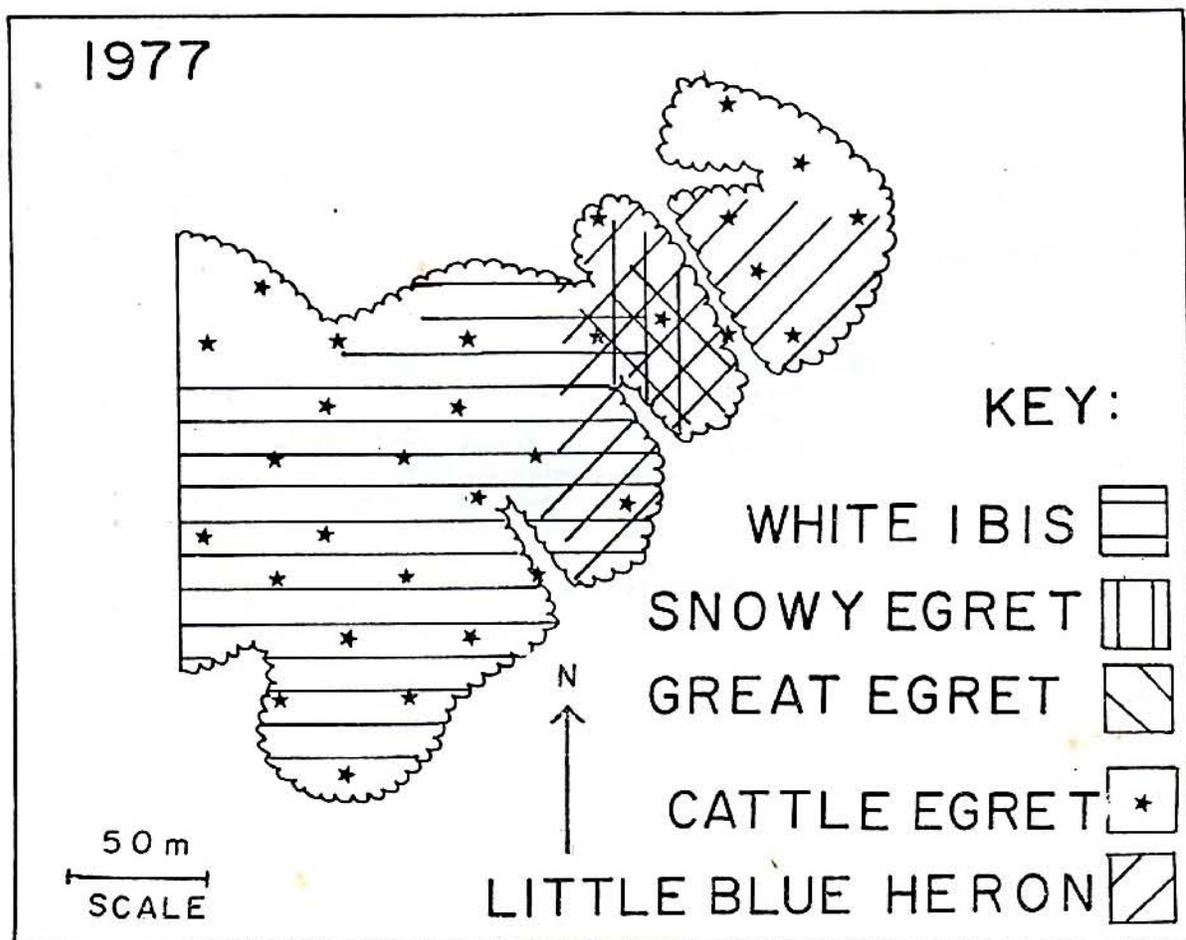


FIGURE 2. Map of the Uniontown heronry in 1977 showing the location of breeding areas.

The present site of the heronry was first used by the herons and egrets in 1970. Previously a heronry was located about 15 kilometers to the northwest, near to Faunsdale. The overstory vegetation of the earlier heronry was deciduous, primarily different oaks (*Quercus* spp.), and was occupied from 1972 until 1976. Apparently the majority of birds moved from this site (see Fig. 2) to the present Uniontown location after the 1975 breeding season, except for some Great Egrets which continued to use the Faunsdale site through the 1976 breeding season. The 1972-76 Faunsdale heronry was preceded by two other sites which were occupied by the herons simultaneously. One of these early heronries was located about 5 kilometers to the west of the 1972-76 Faunsdale site. It is known to have been abandoned in 1972 though the initiation date is obscure. The other heronry was occupied some time in the 1940's and abandoned in 1970. It was located about 4 kilometers to the southwest of the present Uniontown heronry. Local residents were unsure of the initiation date but confirmed that the heronry had been there at least 20 years. A heronry near Brooksville, Mississippi, has been occupied continuously since 1947 (Werschkul 1977a). The overstory vegetation of the 1940's-70 Uniontown heronry was similar to that in the present Uniontown heronry, primarily eastern red cedars.

Discussion

The Uniontown heronry appears to be one of the larger inland breeding colonies of wading birds known. Surprisingly, the two most abundant bird species are not generally associated with upland North American heronries. The Cattle Egret, a relatively new addition to southeastern heronries (Rice 1956), appears to be reaching winter carrying capacity in Florida (Bock and Lepthein 1976) though summer carrying capacity is at present unknown. The White Ibis is indigenous to the new world though generally associated with coastal habitats. The increase inland by the White Ibis may be in response to the decline in the plumage trade (J. Ogden, pers. comm.). Regardless of the causes of the increase in some wading birds in the Uniontown area, this increase presents a number of problems for their management which we wish to explore further.

The consequences of the increasing number of wading birds in the Uniontown area can be separated into three classes: (1) the effects of the different species on each other, (2) the effects of the birds on the nesting habitat, and (3) the tolerance of man to the birds. The first of these questions, on interspecific competition, has been reported on elsewhere (Werschkul 1977b). Though quantitative data on the effect of nest density on future nesting habitat are lacking, it is a common observation that with increasing nest density habitat deterioration is high. Reid visited the 1972-76 Faunsdale heronry and found that the central trees had been defoliated and were dead. Subsequently, the birds nested elsewhere. When herons do shift the location of the breeding colony, it is the Little Blue Herons that locate the new site since they are first to nest. Hence the majority of adverse effects during heronry relocation (e.g., alteration of the normal breeding period) would fall on the Little Blue Herons.

The main problem for the herons in the breeding season is the reaction of man to the heronry. Because of the general ignorance of heron biology among laymen and the heron's normal colonial nesting habits, the heronry has often become the focus of hostile attitudes. In 1976, local residents attempted to move the herons from the present Uniontown site by shooting as many as possible. According to the people present, thousands were killed. However, presumably because of the attachment of herons to the nest site, the birds did not move and returned to nest there in 1977. The landowner is planning to remove the trees this winter from

where the birds have nested. The effects of the shooting on the more common herons is probably minimal, though on the less common herons (e.g., Snowy Egrets and Great Egrets), local extinction is possible. The problem is analogous to the elimination of blackbird roosts in the southeast where other wildlife is threatened by the non-discriminating techniques used (Jackson 1976).

In summary, the Uniontown heronry, among the largest inland congregations of breeding herons, egrets and ibises, is threatened because of increasing size and demands on land use by local residents. While state and federal laws protect the birds and the heronry during the breeding season, enforcement is difficult and does not protect the heronry site during the non-breeding season. Because of economic and aesthetic reasons, it is unreasonable to assume that local landowners will voluntarily restrict land use. Consequently, the probability is small for long-term use of an area by the herons as a breeding site. The simplest solution to this problem is action either by state or private agencies to set aside on a semi-permanent basis land used during the breeding season by the herons. Long-term planning by state or private agencies is urged for the maintenance of a viable wading bird guild in central Alabama.

TABLE 1. Abundance of breeding pairs in the Uniontown heronry, 1977.

<u>Species</u>	<u>% Abundance</u>	<u>Estimate of Breeding Pairs</u>
Cattle Egrets	65%	9810 - 11,810
White Ibises	32%	4200 - 6400
Little Blue Herons	2%	225 - 425
Snowy Egrets	less than 1%	30 - 70
Great Egrets	less than 1%	20 - 60
Total	100%	14,380 - 18,380

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LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL:

FIRST RECORD FOR ALABAMA

Robert A. Duncan

On October 24, 1977, I observed an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus) resting on a piling about 100 feet offshore at Fort Morgan, Alabama. In good light with 7x35 binoculars, I observed that it had a white tail and underparts, yellow bill with indistinct dark markings in a ring toward the end with a red spot at the angle of the mandible, faint brown blurred streakings on the white head and slate-gray wings. Royal Terns (Sterna maxima) and Laughing Gulls (Larus atricilla) were on adjacent posts and allowed easy size comparisons. The Lesser Black-backed Gull appeared to be the same length as the terns and considerably larger than the Laughing Gulls. Shortly thereafter, I was joined by Tom and Joe Imhof, Lucy Duncan, Mary Lou Mattis and Roberta Bonwit who leisurely studied the gull through binoculars and telescopes. Mary Lou Mattis photographed the bird. After it stood up, we observed that its leg coloration was pallid.

The brown streakings on the head indicate an adult in winter plumage (Bent, 1963). Although most individuals have yellow legs, some adults have pallid legs in winter (Peterson, 1974), including some vagrants observed along the Florida east coast (Dan Heathcote, pers. comm.). On October 30, 1977, Lucy Duncan, Bill Young and I again observed the bird on a piling even closer to shore. Its right leg, which had been entangled in fishing line, was completely severed near the knee. We commandeered the boat of an amused fisherman allowing us to measure the post on which the gull had been resting. The post measured 13 inches in diameter, and we estimated the bird in a standing posture was 4 to 6 inches longer than the post. This compares favorably with measurements of Lesser Black-backed Gulls according to Robbins (1966). It was observed by many and was seen as late as November 1, 1977.

There are at least 15 records of Lesser Black-backed Gulls for the Gulf Coast, nine from the Texas coast (Oberholser, 1974) and six for the Florida Gulf Coast north of Key West (American Birds, Vols. 29-31), including two specimens (Woolfenden and Schreiber, 1974; Stevenson, 1975). Both specimens were of the graellsii or Western European race. Woolfenden (1973) now considers Lesser Black-backed Gulls rare but regular winter residents in Florida. Thus, this sighting and photograph may be the precursor of future Alabama records of this rare European wanderer.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to my wife, Lucy, for her assistance in preparation of this article.

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MIGRATORY HOMING ABILITY AMONG

PURPLE MARTINS

Richard K. Crawford

The Purple Martin (Progne subis subis) has been recognized for several centuries as one of North America's most beneficial birds. As early as the late 1700's, Audubon observed martins nesting in gourds erected by Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians in the states of Alabama and Mississippi. Many theories and tales have been created about this beautiful bird that so eagerly nests in man-made sites. One such theory is that the same birds return year after year to the same nesting cavities, and it is this theory that I have chosen to examine more closely.

Question

Do Purple Martins return to the same breeding colonies year after year in sufficiently large numbers to justify the previously mentioned homing theory?

Terms

Local - young bird of present hatching year incapable of sustained flight.

Adult - any breeding bird, whether first or second year plumage.

Methods

Research began in March, 1976, and is still being conducted. Both adults and local birds were banded with aluminum bands provided through the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland. Forty-two birds were banded in the year 1976 at three locations in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. The localities are as follows: (1) Lake Lurleen State Park, approximately eight miles (12.80 kilometers) WNW of Northport, Alabama; (2) and (3) are pair colonies located in the Riverdale subdivision (Tuscaloosa), 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) north of the Black Warrior River and .4 miles (.64 kilometers) east of U. S. Highway 82.

The adult birds were obtained while roosting through the use of an extremely large cone-shaped net, constructed of nylon sheer and fastened to the end of a ten-foot pole. The birds were selected strictly at random; however, at the end of the first banding period (March to June, 1976), the birds' sex ratio broke at exactly 50% males and 50% females. Two local birds were also obtained, but these were not included in the overall sex ratio tabulations.

Results

On February 12, 1977, the first martins of the 1977 breeding season arrived. On Thursday, February 17, studies resumed. Banding is still being carried out, with an expected goal of 200+. The first returns are also beginning to filter in. However, in no way are they to be considered conclusive.

The only returns so far have been females. This is not to say that males do not return to the same colony. It is too early to say that any return is anything more than accidental. In a recent conversation with Charles R. Brown, it was noted that in a similar study being conducted in North Central Texas (where only local birds are being banded), the exact opposite results have occurred. There are at least two more years of study before any conclusions can be obtained. However, this limited information does tend to provide new angles from which to explore this fascinating creature, the Purple Martin.

If anyone in the West Alabama area has a colony they would like to include in the study, I will be happy to try to fit it into my schedule.

90 Woodridge
Tuscaloosa 35401

BARN SWALLOWS BREEDING IN SOUTHEAST ALABAMA

Brent Ortego

Within the last 15 years, the northern breeding population of Barn Swallows has been extending its range southward in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama (Stewart 1964, 1965, 1968; Holmes 1974; Kennedy 1974). In Alabama, Imhof (1975) illustrated that the northern breeding population of Barn Swallows nested throughout the state, except in the Piedmont, the Southeast and the lower tier of counties. (Barn Swallows nesting in lower Mobile and Baldwin Counties are from a southern breeding population.) This range expansion of the northern population has been associated with man's building activities (bridges, culverts, etc.) in areas of suitable habitat.

I located no previously published accounts of this species nesting in southeast Alabama and southwest Georgia. During May and June, 1977, I examined all bridges located over the Walter F. George Reservoir south of Ft. Benning and many bridges and culverts in Lee, Russell and Barbour Counties, Alabama, for active Barn Swallow nests. Active nests were located: Alabama - five 2.1 miles north and ten 0.3 miles south of the Lee County Hwy. 81 intersection with Ala. Hwy. 169; 16 at the Ala. Hwy. 165 crossing of Hatchechubbee Creek, Russell County; 26 and 18 at the Barbour County Hwy. 97 crossing of the south- and mid-forks of Cowikee Creek, respectively; 13 at the U.S. Hwy. 431 crossing of Cheneyhatchee Creek, Barbour County; 8 at the Ala. Hwy. 95 crossing of White Oak Creek, Barbour and Henry Counties; 2 at the Old River Road crossing of Harbridge Creek, Henry County; Georgia - 8 at the Florence Landing Marina, Stewart County; 27 at the Ga. Hwy. 39 crossing of Pataula Creek, Clay County. In Lee County, two colonies were located in culverts adjacent to lowland pastures. Near large open areas, concrete bridges spanning creeks were almost solely used for nesting at the Walter F. George Reservoir. Although several steel and wooden bridges were examined at similar sites in Stewart and Quitman Counties, no nests were found. During a nest-site selection study in east-central Mississippi, Jackson and Burchfield (1975) also found that Barn Swallows selected concrete over wooden and steel bridges.

After reviewing the literature and actively searching for colonies, I have come to the conclusion that the limiting factor controlling further expansion of the breeding range of the northern Barn Swallow in lower Alabama is the development of suitable nesting sites in the form of concrete bridges over water adjacent to large open areas and culverts next to lakes or large pastures.

I thank Gail Bader for helping me gather data.

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GREAT WHITE HERON SIGHTED AT MARION, ALABAMA

Harriett H. Findlay

A Great White Heron, Ardea herodias occidentalis, white phase of the Great Blue Heron, Ardea herodias, was observed at Lakeland Farms, Marion, Alabama, on September 8, 1977. The bird was viewed for 30 minutes with a 20-power balscope at about 100 yards distance. The large yellowish-colored bill and pale yellowish legs were noted. In the same scope view was a Great Blue Heron and on the same lake was a Great Egret for comparison. The size of this heron, which stood in water near the Great Blue Heron, made a significant comparison of the larger size of the Great White Heron. Hurricane Babe passed through the Florida Keys striking the west coast of Louisiana on the night of September 4, 1977. The storm then moved inland in a northeasterly course passing through the Marion area near midnight of September 6. It is possible that this heron was picked up by Hurricane Babe and then carried by the resulting storm to this "alien land." Other observers in the party were Susan Holt, Helen Kittinger and Ann Miller.

TELEVISION TOWER CASUALTIES AT HUNTSVILLE

FALL, 1976

C. Dwight Cooley

In the fall of 1976, regular collections were made and daily records kept of bird casualties at WHNT television tower in Huntsville, Alabama. The tower is located east of Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama, atop Monte Sano Mountain and is of the needle-type construction. WHNT tower, supported by 12 cables, is 1000 ft. tall and reaches an altitude of approximately 2600 ft. above sea level.

Collections were begun on September 30 and terminated October 31. During this period of 32 consecutive days of collection, 42 individuals of 18 species were recorded. Table 1 depicts the species list, total number of birds and the collection dates. Since one cannot determine whether a bird fell before or after midnight, the morning collection dates are used.

The Magnolia Warbler spanned the longest period, being found from September 30 to October 17, with 7 individuals collected. The Bay-breasted Warbler was next, occurring from October 1 to October 14, with 9 individuals, 5 of these on October 1, representing the largest number of specimens for any one species.

The heaviest kill occurred on the night of September 30-October 1 with the passing of a rainy cold front and northerly winds. On that night, 15 individuals of 9 species were recorded. The next heaviest kill occurred on the night of October 13-14 with 9 individuals of 4 species being recorded. It is interesting to note that the night of October 13-14 was clear, but a dense fog covered the Tennessee Valley, possibly contributing to the kill.

Warblers constituted the bulk of casualties with 27 individuals of 8 species. These figures represent 64% of the total individuals and 44% of the species. These figures are to be expected since warblers are almost exclusively nocturnal migrants and, therefore, highly susceptible to structures such as communications towers and ceilometers.

It should be noted that no extreme dates were recorded possibly because collections were started well into migration and terminated before migration ended. The importance of tower casualties should not be underestimated. Much useful scientific data as well as museum specimens can be obtained from these collections.

I wish to express gratitude to several individuals. Many thanks go to the staff and management of WHNT-TV, especially Mr. Tom Purser, station manager, and Mr. Jerome Hall, station engineer. A special note of thanks to Mr. Michael Lee Bierly of Nashville, Tennessee, who prompted these collections and examined specimens.

TABLE 1: Species list, total numbers and collection dates. Numbers in parentheses indicate total on given date.

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>TOTAL INDIVIDUALS</u>	<u>DATE COLLECTED</u>
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	Oct. 1
Gray Catbird	5	Oct. 4(2), 5(2), 17
Wood Thrush	1	Oct. 17
Swainson's Thrush	1	Sept. 30
Gray-cheeked Thrush	1	Oct. 1
Red-eyed Vireo	2	Oct. 14(2)
Tennessee Warbler	3	Oct. 1(2), 7
Magnolia Warbler	7	Sept. 30, Oct. 1, 14(2), 17
Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler	1	Oct. 21
Chestnut-sided Warbler	2	Oct. 4(2)
Bay-breasted Warbler	9	Oct. 1(5), 7, 11, 14(2)
Kentucky Warbler	1	Oct. 14
Common Yellowthroat	1	Oct. 1
American Redstart	1	Oct. 1
Bobolink	1	Oct. 1
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	3	Oct. 1(2), 7
White-crowned Sparrow	1	Oct. 26
White-throated Sparrow	1	Oct. 21
TOTAL	<u>42</u>	

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FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF WHITE-FACED IBIS FOR ALABAMA

AND A NEW AREA OF PLEGADIS SYMPATRY

Charles D. Duncan and Paul G. Johnson

An unconfirmed report of White-faced Ibis (Plegadis chihi) breeding on Cat Island, Alabama, during June, 1976, has appeared [J. R. Stewart, 1976, Regional Report (Central Southern Region), American Birds 30:966]. Such a record would be the first breeding record for the state and would be all the more significant, in that the Glossy Ibis (Plegadis falcinellus) also breeds on Cat Island (G. R. Gaston, 1976, Alabama Birdlife 24:14). The American Birds report is surprising in that at least 62 Plegadis (12 falcinellus and 50 chihi) are mentioned as breeding. Nonetheless, during Gaston's and Johnson's (1977, Northeast Gulf Science 1:14) extensive observations of the heronry there during the same period, one of us (PGJ) saw only three pairs of Plegadis on a regular basis and only three Plegadis nests were found.

We are now able to confirm the breeding of the White-faced Ibis on Cat Island during both the 1976 and 1977 breeding seasons. The island has been previously described by Gaston and Johnson (1977). During the first week of June, 1977, we made several trips to the island during the early morning hours. Six Plegadis were observed on each occasion. Two of these were firmly identified as White-faced Ibises on the basis of the wide white patch of feathers bordering the face, the rusty-red color of the face and legs and the bright red iris (H. Pratt, 1976, Birding 8:1), all clearly visible through a twenty-power spotting scope. No more than two of the birds could be identified at any one time, but at no time did we see a bird which could be firmly identified as a Glossy Ibis. We obtained clear color photographs of one of the birds identified as a White-faced Ibis and have deposited them with the Alabama Ornithological Society Slide Collection (c/o Mrs. Helen Kittinger, 1612 Colesbury Circle, Birmingham, Alabama 35226). In addition, a Plegadis nest was found in the same marsh elder (Iva frutescens) where the White-faced Ibis was photographed and repeatedly seen to alight, confirming that the birds were indeed breeding and not merely transients. Two other Plegadis nests were also found, thereby accounting for all the ibises regularly seen on the island during the 1977 season.

During the course of these studies, Mr. Tom Walker of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab allowed us to inspect six color slides he made during May or June, 1976, of a single Plegadis individual on Cat Island. This bird is also clearly identifiable as a White-faced Ibis on the basis of the same characters mentioned above. This identification, coupled with Gaston's Glossy Ibis photograph (Gaston, 1976) confirms Cat Island during 1976 as the third known area of sympatry between P. chihi and P. falcinellus; Pratt (1976) lists Cameron Parish, Louisiana, and the Mississippi Delta as the other two. Whether Cat Island continues to be an area of sympatry or whether our lack of observation of Glossy Ibis indicates that they no longer breed on Cat Island is unknown. Studies during the 1978 breeding season will be directed toward the identification and behavioral relations between the two species.

Acknowledgments

The Birmingham and Mobile Bay (Alabama) Audubon Societies and the Dauphin Island Sea Lab are thanked for their generous support of this work. We are also extremely grateful to Mr. Tom Walker for the opportunity to view his excellent photographs of the 1976 bird.

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LIBRARIAN'S REPORT

In a recent note on nesting reciprocity in Eastern Phoebes and Barn Swallows [The Wilson Bulletin, 89, 632-5 (1977)], Harmon Weeks cites three references pertinent to the subject. One of these is an article by Jerome Jackson and Ray Weeks which appeared in Alabama Birdlife, 24, 7-9 (1976). With this issue, Alabama Birdlife completes 25 years of continuous publication. Apart from the semi-annual meetings, it has been the chief means of communication of A.O.S. with its members. It has also served as the major repository of ornithological records from Alabama and northwest Florida. Those concerned with the publication and distribution of Alabama Birdlife are committed to continuing and augmenting these functions. It is gratifying to see our journal cited elsewhere in the ornithological literature, because citations such as the one above are evidence of success in our efforts to disseminate the contributions to ornithology that originate in our area. Major credit for this success goes, of course, to the many contributors who provide articles for publication, to our editors - of whom the present is James Peavy, and to those in charge of circulation - notably Naomi Banks - who handle distribution to A.O.S. members and other subscribers. Recognition of this will put what follows in proper perspective, because this is to be a report of the A.O.S. Librarian.

From the beginning, the Ralph Brown Draughon Library of Auburn University has managed the publication exchange program for our society. We exchange publications on a volume-per-volume basis with some 25 other organizations. Some of the publications that are received in exchange are The Wilson Bulletin, Egretta and The Ring - major European journals - and a number of important state publications. The returns from exchange are used to enhance the Auburn library's holdings in ornithology. Our association with Auburn has several advantages for us:

1. Space to house our substantial collection of back issues - space is at a premium in libraries everywhere.
2. Proper management of our exchange program - Auburn handles mailing and necessary correspondence, provides periodic inventories and updates the exchange list from time to time.
3. An efficient and cordial staff, notably Mrs. Farley Fish, Gifts and Exchanges Librarian, who are willing to accommodate all requests regarding dispersals from our collection of back issues.

The exchange program represents 10-15% of our circulation and is especially significant in a scholarly sense, because it contributes to other ornithological collections. After a lapse for various reasons and of short duration, we are caught up, and the exchange program is running smoothly again. While the Auburn library is not now actively seeking to increase the exchange list, additions to the list can be arranged by writing me.

Another program, this one undertaken just recently, seeks to place (as gifts) collections of back issues in various libraries in Alabama and northwest Florida which did not previously have them. The university libraries at Tuscaloosa, Auburn and Jacksonville have complete collections of Alabama Birdlife to the best of my knowledge. Almost complete sets have recently been given to the libraries of University of South Alabama and University of Alabama in Birmingham and to the Birmingham Public Library, and other donations are being arranged. All donations are made with the understanding that obtaining future issues is the responsibility

of the recipient and not A.O.S. I will be happy to assist in placing collections of back issues in other deserving libraries in our area under the same ground rules but must ask your help with some of the initial legwork. Please ask a reference librarian in the library under consideration if they will accept such a set (about 60 issues) and then give them my address. Some libraries (e.g., University of Alabama in Huntsville) are hesitant to accept because of space problems.

Back issues of Alabama Birdlife may also be purchased, and this has been an additional, though minor, source of revenue to A.O.S. For instance, TVA has recently ordered a complete set of back issues, and the order is now being processed. If you would like to purchase back issues for your collection, please send your want lists to me. The price to A.O.S. members is presently \$1.00 per issue.

Recently, Mr. Millard Prather, an A.O.S. member from Birmingham, offered the society a substantial collection of back issues of ornithological journals (including Auk, The Wilson Bulletin and American Birds) with the request that it be placed in a library in Birmingham. The collection is now in the periodical stacks of the Mervyn Sterne Library of University of Alabama in Birmingham. In return, the U.A.B. library extends full checkout privileges to A.O.S. members. Those who wish to check out books from the library need only show evidence of A.O.S. membership to the Science Reference Librarian, Ms. Virginia Jackson, to get a card good for a year. Periodicals understandably may not be removed from the library, but the library has an open stack policy for periodicals, and no special card is necessary to use them. We thank Mr. Prather for his gift. It is a significant benefit to U.A.B. and to A.O.S. members, especially those from Birmingham. If I can be of similar service to other A.O.S. members, please let me know.

Howard M. Einspahr
2731 Hanover Circle
Birmingham, Ala. 35205

AOS BUSINESS MEETING

The annual business meeting of Alabama Ornithological Society was held April 29, 1977, following a seafood buffet at the Dauphin Island Community Center. President Russell Bailey called the meeting to order and gave recognition to the Society's twenty-fifth anniversary and to the founder, the late Blanche Dean. The following slate of officers was unanimously elected: President, J. Russell Bailey; Vice President and President-Elect, Dr. Jim Thompson; and Treasurer, Martha Rogers.

Robert R. Reid read a resolution opposing uneconomic water projects. The membership voted to adopt the resolution and to send copies to appropriate persons. Mr. Reid also urged members to send articles and notes of interest to Editor James V. Peavy to be published in Alabama Birdlife.

Members who would like to support Paul Johnson's research on the wading birds nesting on Cat Island were encouraged to send checks to the Marine Research Lab.

The following door prizes were awarded: Penguins Past and Present, Here and There, Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America and an original painting by Doris Kingsbery.

Dr. Henry M. Stevenson, Professor Emeritus of Zoology at Florida State University, presented an interesting and informative program concerning his studies of the Boat-tailed Grackle. He discussed and illustrated with slides the different subspecies and their subtle differences along with observations concerning habitat.

Helen Thigpen
Secretary Pro Tem

FALL MEETING

We all (about 50) enjoyed the meeting in Destin, Florida, last October. It's a delightful small town with good fishing and good birding. We even had a male Yellowthroat by the indoor pool at the Seascape Inn.

On Friday, Bill Summerour gave the program with emphasis on the nesting habits of the Swainson's Warbler, the Song Sparrow, the Gray and the Eastern Kingbirds and the Resplendent Quetzal. The Resplendent Quetzal, the national bird of Guatemala, was observed by Dr. Summerour at Vol-Baru in the rain forest of Panama and is, of course, a leading contender for the title of the most beautiful bird in the world.

Attending the Directors' Meeting were Russell Bailey, Jim Thompson, Martha Rogers, Bob Duncan, Howard Einspahr, Curtis Kingsbery, Eric Lefstad, Robert Reid, Tom Rogers and our guest, Henry Stevenson.

The 1979 Dauphin Island Spring Meeting will be a joint meeting of AOS and of FOS (Florida OS). Date will be April 21 (first choice) or April 7 (second choice) to not conflict with the fishing rodeo. Curtis will write FOS after Russell clears the date.

The Directors appointed the following Alabama State List Committee: Thomas A. Imhof, Chairman; James V. Peavy; Robert R. Reid. This committee is responsible for determining the status of a species in Alabama, including whether or not a particular species is to be included on the Alabama State List.

It was our privilege to have Mrs. Dorothy Coffeen attend the buffet dinner. Mrs. Coffeen recently gave 209 acres, including a 60-acre lake, to the Sierra Foundation as the Coffeen Wildlife Refuge, the place of one of the AOS field trips. Also, Mr. George Bennett, Warden of the Audubon Sanctuary on Dauphin Island, was present.

The Society unanimously adopted two resolutions: Resolution Opposing Degradation of Water Quality in Alabama Watercourses, and Resolution Supporting Designation of Cahaba River as Wild and Scenic River.

Howard Einspahr, our Librarian, reported that Alabama Birdlife is now in the Birmingham Public Library and the libraries of the University of Alabama, University of Alabama Birmingham, University of South Alabama, Auburn University, Birmingham Southern College, Jacksonville State University. The Auburn Library manages the exchange program whereby AOS exchanges publications with some 25 organizations. We need back issues of Alabama Birdlife, particularly any issue of Volume 18 (1970) or of issue No. 2 of Volume 19 (1971). Please mail to Howard Einspahr, 2731 Hanover Circle, Birmingham, Alabama 35205.

Door prizes were: The Birds of the Bahamas by P. G. C. Brudennell-Bruce, How to Attract, House and Feed Birds by Walter E. Schutz, Field Guide to Nests (birds, mammals, insects, etc.) by Headstom, and a grand prize given by Doris Kingsbery of a large Arrowhead Sanddollar with a painting by Doris Kingsbery of sanddunes and sea oats.

Mr. Curtis L. Kingsbery then gave a program on his and Doris' adventure in Trinidad, complete with slides of the scenery and the birds and with recordings of bird songs. It was a fine meeting. Hope to see you at Dauphin Island the weekend of April 15, 1978.

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Treasurer's Report

6-10-76 thru 6-12-77

Checkbook Balance 6-10-76	\$ 712.57
Plus Deposits	<u>359.56</u>
	\$1,072.13
Less Disbursements	<u>506.42</u>
Checkbook Balance 6-12-77	\$ 505.71
Bank Balance 6-12-77	\$ 505.71

Description of Disbursements

Postage	\$ 69.36
Typing <u>Alabama Birdlife</u> , Vol. 24, 1-2, 3-4	76.50
Hallelujah Press, <u>Alabama Birdlife</u> , Vol. 24, 1-2, 3-4	286.00
Expenses, AOS Fall Meeting	16.11
Reimbursement to Scott Gravette for overpaid membership	2.00
Slide Collection - Robert Reid, Jr.	54.45
Supplies	<u>2.00</u>
Total Disbursements	\$ 506.42

Savings Account Balance \$1,119.07

The dues for 1978 should be sent to the treasurer: Martha S. Rogers
2708 43rd Avenue, East
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35401

Classes of Membership

ACTIVE	\$ 5.00
ASSOCIATE (outside Alabama and Northwest Florida)	4.00
FAMILY	8.00
SUSTAINING	10.00
STUDENT	3.00
LIFE	100.00

Each member is urged to remit the proper amount as soon as possible in order to save the Society the expense of mailing dues notices.