

THE SEASON, SUMMER-FALL

June through November, 1977

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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:

Alabama Ornithological Society, Birmingham Audubon Society, Thomas Z. Atkeson, J. Russell Bailey, George Bennett, Michael L. Bierly, Charlotte D. Blackshear, Don Bland, Thomas A. Brindley, D. Mark Brown, C. Dwight Cooley, J. L. Dorn, Charles D. Duncan, Lucy R. Duncan, Robert A. Duncan, Julian L. Dusi, Howard M. Einspahr,

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HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS OF THE UNIONTOWN HERONRY

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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.