

1992 SPRING AND SUMMER SIGHTINGS

Greg D. Jackson

The spring of 1992 brought unprecedented birding coverage to our area, but unfortunately the witnessed migration was below average. Several observers commented on the scarcity of transient passerines on the coast. There were reports of several lingering waterfowl. Shorebirds were generally decreased, with acceptable habitat in limited supply in many areas. There were a few exciting birds, though, most notably passerine strays from the south and unusual larids.

The apparent poor migration probably had much to do with the paucity of frontal systems that grounded migrants. As we hosted the biennial American Birding Association Convention in Mobile 20-26 April, the lack of migrants was disappointing. However, the visitors appeared to relish our abundant breeding birds and waterbirds, and I believe had a great time despite the lack of fallouts. The best birding on the coast was in March, with a few minor precipitations of transients noted at Ft. Pickens, Florida. In general, the spring was slightly cooler and much drier than normal. Temperatures in June and July were unremarkable, but rainfall was above average.

This report covers the period from March through July 1992 in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle (east to the Apalachicola River). The appearance of observations in this column does not suggest verification or acceptance of records for very rare species; these must be considered by the appropriate state records committees. It is important that all submissions for birds that are rare, either in general or for a particular season or region, be accompanied by adequate details of the observation. The extent of this documentation depends on the rarity of the species and the difficulty of identification. Reports should always describe the conditions of observation and the diagnostic characters observed. Your help in this matter is appreciated.

County names are in *italics*. "GC" = Gulf Coast (Alabama), "MR" = Mountain Region, "TV" = Tennessee Valley, "WP" = Western Panhandle of Florida (*Escambia*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Okaloosa*). Records not specifying Florida are in Alabama. "acc." = accepted by the Alabama Bird Records Committee, "m.ob." = many observers, "NWR" = National Wildlife Refuge, "p.a." = pending acceptance by the Alabama Bird Records Committee, "ph." = photographed.

LOONS - RAPTORS: Common Loons are unusual in summer on the coast, and one was spotted 23 June at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* (FJM,JMM,JTM). Two Eared Grebes, rare in the WP, were at Ft. Walton Beach, *Okaloosa*, 12 March - 6 April (RAD). **Shearwaters** are always exciting finds in our area, and this year produced two large shearwaters (either Greater or Cory's). One was in Pensacola Bay Pass, *Escambia*, FL, 4 April (JP), and another was at Gulf Shores 26 April (JH). The 750 Am. White Pelicans 2 April at Big Sabine, *Escambia*, FL (RAD,SN) must have been

impressive.

Eight Double-crested Cormorants flying over a residential area near Birmingham 14 April (ALM) were an odd sight. A late cormorant was at Town Creek, *Colbert*, 25 May (GDJ,DGJ). Three Anhingas were soaring at Fosters, *Tuscaloosa*, 11 July (TAI,SSH); this primitive bird is rare that far north. The eight Glossy Ibis 18-22 April at Blakely I., *Mobile* (GDJ,m.ob.) were unusually numerous for spring. A new Alabama maximum for Wood Stork was set by the 140 birds in *Hale* 7 July (ALM,HHF,ASC).

Greater Scaup are always good finds inland; three were at Decatur, *Limestone*, 1 March (SWM). A late Oldsquaw was near Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin*, 21-25 April (GM,m.ob.). I had two reports of late inland Surf Scoters. One was at L. Porter, *Jefferson*, 25-29 April (TAI,m.ob.); the individual 12 May in the Tennessee R. at Town Creek, *Colbert/Lauderdale* (ALM,ASC) established a new late date for Alabama. Red-breasted Mergansers were abundant 26 March in *Escambia*, FL, with 700 birds counted in the Gulf (RAD,D&BC). A lone Red-breasted 25 May in *Morgan* (GDJ) was late. A rare MR spring sighting of Peregrine Falcon occurred in n., *Shelby* 9 March (GDJ); another 24 May at Ft. Pickens (RLB) set a new WP late record.

SHOREBIRDS - LARIDS: A Black-bellied Plover, rare inland in spring, was spotted 3 May at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert* (GDJ,DGJ). Lesser Golden-Plovers are regular in spring in our area, though they are more difficult to find in the MR. At least 15 birds were at Harpersville, *Shelby*, 20 March (ALM). Eight Piping Plovers were found at Gulf Shores 30 April (ALM), a good number in Alabama for this imperiled shorebird. Six Willets made a rare inland appearance 2 May in e. *Colbert* (PDK,DCP,WJR). A new early Alabama date for Whimbrel was set by the observation of a lone bird 21 March at Dauphin I., *Mobile* (GDJ,DGJ).

Marbled Godwits are regular in small numbers in migration on the Alabama coast. Ten birds were notable at Ft. Morgan 12 April (GDJ,DGJ,RAD,LRD *et al.*). A new Alabama maximum was set 17 April at Dauphin I. by the sighting of 13 Marbled Godwits (GDJ,DGJ,PEL,m.ob.); it is possible that the previous Ft. Morgan birds comprised part of this flock. A good number of Sanderlings, an estimated 250 birds, was at Big Sabine, *Escambia*, FL, 26 March (RAD,D&BC). Long-billed Dowitchers are rarely identified inland in spring; four were recorded at Muscle Shoals 3 May (GDJ). The Am. Woodcock is a rare breeder on the coast, and a fledgling found 25 April marked the first nesting record for *Bay*, FL (R&AI). Another woodcock was spotted 1 June in DeFuniak Springs, *Walton*, FL (TAI,LL).

A rare **Pomarine Jaeger** was located at Dauphin I. 17 April (PEL,SF). Eleven Laughing Gulls were a surprise flying over Birmingham 3 June (GDJ); this species is rare inland, especially in the MR, and this was an unusual number of individuals. Franklin's Gulls are also rare inland, though they are seen in most years. An adult was noted in the n.e. *Colbert* area along the Tennessee R. 7-17 May (ALM *et al.*).

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Alabama's third **Little Gull** was spotted 11 April at Ft. Morgan (JH,JB,ph.,acc.); this dainty vagrant, the first for the GC, was enjoyed by hundreds of observers through at least 27 April. Another rarity was the **Black-legged Kittiwake** 17 April at the mouth of Mobile Bay (PEL,SF,CAM,B&SL,acc.); this represented only the sixth record for Alabama. A Least Tern 26 March in Pensacola (JWB) was early, as was a Black Tern 11 July in *Hale* (TAI,SSH).

DOVES - SWALLOWS: The **Eurasian Collared-Dove** invasion continued this year; at the time of this writing the species has not yet been accepted by the continental records committees. Collared-doves were recorded this spring, beginning 5 April, in Gulf Breeze and Pensacola Beach, FL (RAD,m.ob.). The second confirmed record for Alabama was 16-21 April at Ft. Morgan (RAD,VBF,MFF,LB,m.ob.,acc.). There is evidence now of a large inland jump by collared-doves. Over 30 birds, including an apparent juvenile, were seen throughout the period in Montgomery (LFG *et al.*, p.a.) (see Gardella (1992, *Al. Birdlife* 39(2):3-4)). A White-winged Dove, difficult to find in spring, was at Ft. Morgan 26 April (JH,JB *et al.*). Short-eared Owls are scarce anytime on the coast; the first spring GC record came 21 April when one was found under an oleander bush at Ft. Morgan (PEL,m.ob.)! An adult male Rufous Hummingbird made a rare, but not unexpected, appearance in Birmingham 24 July - 25 August (RRS,MBS).

Olive-sided Flycatchers are rarely seen in spring in our area; a lone bird was at Wheeler NWR, *Morgan*, 3 May (GDJ,DGJ). The Least Flycatcher is rare on the outer coast in spring, so one studied 19 April at Dauphin I. (KK,SRD,SWM) was noteworthy. The first spring record of W. Kingbird for the TV came 12-13 May in *Limestone* (JM,DJS); this species is seldom seen inland. The most exciting, and frustrating, find of the season was the **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** discovered on Dauphin I. as a front passed 20 April (RAD,WJB *et al.*,acc.). Only five people were present to see the bird, which could not be relocated despite intensive searching by birders arriving at the ABA Convention. There was only one previous Alabama record of this species, of a similarly uncooperative bird at Ft. Morgan 24 April 1988.

An early N. Rough-winged Swallow was at Waterloo, *Lauderdale* 15 March (GDJ,BCG). The inland population of Cliff Swallow has slowly expanded to the southwest over the last 30 years. For the second year, nesting birds were found on the Cahaba R. in *Perry* beginning 17 May (ALM,HHF,ASC). Breeding was also noted 11 July on the Warrior R. in *Tuscaloosa* (TAI,SSH) at a site first discovered in 1975. **Cave Swallows** are rare spring vagrants on the outer coast, first noted in 1984. The ninth state record came 12 April at Ft. Morgan (BS,JRW,SWM,JH,JB *et al.*,acc.); another sighting of this or a different individual occurred at that locale 19 April (RAD,LRD,WWD,acc.). An early Barn Swallow was at Waterloo, *Lauderdale*, 15 March (GDJ,BCG).

WRENS - BLACKBIRDS: A new late WP record for Winter Wren was provided by a singing bird 19 April at Ft. Pickens (RLB,JWB). The Swainson's

Thrush 25 May in Wheeler NWR, *Morgan* (GDJ) set a new late TV date. Gray Catbird is very rare in summer in n.w. Florida; two were seen in June for the second year at L. Seminole, *Jackson* (TAI). A late Am. Pipit was in e. *Shelby* 2 May (ALM,ADM). Warbling Vireos are rare transients (and casual breeders) in our region. An early individual was in Birmingham 12 April (BCG), and another bird was spotted at Ft. Morgan 22 April (KK,JLD,GM *et al.*).

This was a great spring for Black-whiskered Vireos, with at least eight reported on the outer coast. One was at Ft. Morgan 11 April (D&KJ,JH,SWM,m.ob.); another was picked out at Ft. Pickens, FL, 19 April (RLB,JWB). Minimums of three Black-whiskered on Dauphin I. and two at Ft. Morgan were noted 22-26 April (ABA). The final bird was spotted at Ft. Morgan 7 May (RAD). A Tennessee Warbler provided a new Alabama arrival date 21 March at Dauphin I. (GDJ,DGJ). Also early was a N. Parula 8 March in *Montgomery* (LFG), setting a new early date for inland Alabama. A fallout of hundreds of N. Parulas and Yellow-throated Warblers was reported at Ft. Pickens, FL, 12 March (WF,GF).

Black-throated Blue Warblers are uncommon migrants; one was at Ft. Pickens, FL, 19 April (RLB,JWB), and at least three were seen 22-26 April at Ft. Morgan and Dauphin I. (ABA). Early arrivals included Blackburnian and Cerulean warblers and an Am. Redstart at Ft. Pickens, FL, 31 March (OEF,WF,m.ob.). The Black-and-white Warbler 30 May at Ft. Pickens, FL (JWB) was very late. A Prothonotary Warbler tied the previous WP early date 12 March at Ft. Pickens (WF). Swainson's Warblers are unusual breeders in n.w. Alabama, so a singing bird at Muscle Shoals first discovered 19 July (GNP) was noteworthy. The first weekend of May was good for the rare **Mourning Warbler** in n. Alabama. Single birds were located 2 May in *Shelby* (HHF), and 3 May in *Morgan* (GDJ) and *Jefferson* (RRR). The Hooded Warbler at Ft. Pickens 12 March (WF) provided a new WP early arrival.

Two late Grasshopper Sparrows were singing 22 April near Foley, *Baldwin* (GDJ); none were noted at this site 13 June. Lincoln's Sparrow can be hard to find in spring. One 26 April at Dauphin I. (JH,JB) set a new late GC record. Unusual inland sightings included singles 5-9 May in Huntsville, *Madison* (DRC) and 7 May at Wheeler NWR, *Morgan* (ALM). The **Shiny Cowbird** continued to assault the coast this spring. There were 8-12 birds at Ft. Morgan 11-26 April (JH,JB,m.ob.,acc.), and 2-3 were at Dauphin I. 17-26 April (ABA,p.a.). A **Bronzed Cowbird**, the seventh for Alabama, was at Dauphin I. 22 April (NLN,DG,p.a.); possibly the same bird was at Ft. Morgan the following day (FB,HHK,BCG,m.ob.,ph.CDB,acc.).

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ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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1992-93 FALL AND WINTER SIGHTINGS

Greg D. Jackson

Autumn and winter are times of excitement for birders, as we lick our lips in anticipation of tasty vagrants. This fall was satisfying in that regard, with two first Alabama records; the winter yielded several choice rarities. Numbers of non-passerine migrants seemed good, though waterfowl were scarce at the coast this winter. Good numbers of transient passerines were noted at the coast in the fall.

August was cooler than normal, but temperatures were not unusual during the remainder of the autumn. Though there were cool spells in early December and late February, most of the winter was warm. The seven-month period generally had higher-than-expected rainfall, excepting October (normal) and February (dry). Tropical activity was limited to the rainfall 27 August in n. Alabama from the dissipating Hurricane Andrew. I received few reports of rarities in our area thought directly related to that storm. The most productive frontal systems were 28-29 August, 27-29 September, and 11-12 October.

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