

THE SEASON, Spring
March, April, May 1973
Thomas A. Imhof, Editor

March was warm and vegetation was about normal to one week early. Development of vegetation slowed down in a cool April and May liberally sprinkled with storms, heavy rain, and cold fronts that produced loads of grounded migrants. Lib Toenes said that on Dauphin Island birding in March and April was the greatest in years although short on a few species. Best days were March 30, April 4,7,8,27 - all preceded by rain or north wind. Alice Tait came down from Massachusetts for six weeks at Dauphin, got 200 species and said that this was the best season in the ten years she has been coming to the island. L. A. Wells, of Columbus, Georgia, said of this "fantastic migration" that "it was late, had an eastward diversion from rains and floods in the Mississippi Valley, and included three fortuitous weekends of clear weather after rains and prolonged low temperature". Tom Atkeson reported nearly all of Wheeler Refuge under water, but fresh mudflat along White Spring Dike, coupled with stiff north winds and unusually cool temperatures, produced a "whole handful of goodies" including many shorebird records.

BANDING - Four mist-netters operating on the coast this Spring produced valuable information on skulkers and relative abundance of some migrants. Margaret Miller operated 15 days on Dauphin during March 22 to May 9 and banded 548 birds of 54 species, including 180 birds on April 4. James V. Peavy netted at Fort Morgan on 11 days, April 9-May 1, and banded 367 birds of 56 species. Totals and peaks for the top 15 species by these two banders were: Hooded Warbler 100, peak 46 April 4 (MEM); White-eyed Vireo 73, peak 15 March 29 and April 1 (MEM); Worm-eating Warbler 50, peak 16 on April 4 (MEM); Catbird 48, peak 9 April 26 (MEM); Parula Warbler 44, peak 25 March 29 (MEM); Red-eyed Vireo 39, peak 13 April 4 (MEM); Whitethroated Sparrow 25, peak 9 on April 11 (JVP); Wood Thrush and Kentucky Warbler 34, peak 10 and 21 April 4 (MEM); Indigo Bunting 32, peak 16 April 26 (MEM); Swainson's Warbler 30, peak 15 April 4 (MEM); Blue Jay 23, Prothonotary Warbler 22, Ovenbird 21, Northern Waterthrush 20. Of 37 migrant brown thrushes (Swainson's, Gray-cheeked, Veery) 34 were banded April 26 to May 1.

Noteworthy records for the period:

Brown Pelican - 112 Dauphin May 23 (LRT) maximum for last 14 years.
Anhinga - Wheeler Refuge April 11 (HEJ) first local record in 10 years.
Yellow-crowned Night Heron - Birmingham March 7 (GC,WLC) earliest north of Fall Line.
Least Bittern - Dauphin April 4, "saw more on one bush than previously in whole life"(LRT); Fort Morgan 17 April 5 (JVP mob).
Wood Stork - Claiborne, Monroe Co., May 13 (CLK,KB,CP) earliest State.
Glossy Ibis - Fort Morgan April 14-15 (AOS); Dauphin April 19 (AGT); Cat I. April 23 (DB); may breed again in State.
Shoveler - Headland 15 on April 13 (MF) latest spring LCP.
Blue-winged Teal - Choctaw NWR May 26, 4 birds, latest for LCP (CLK,MLM,LEG,NB).
Redhead - Swan Creek April 30 (JLW,EM) latest for Tennessee Valley.
Common Goldeneye - Tanner, Limestone Co., April 25 (DCH) latest inland record.
Ruddy Duck - Open Pond, Covington Co., March 17 (CLK,mob) latest LCP.
Mississippi Kite - Spring Hill March 29 (MAG) ties earliest for Gulf Coast.

Swainson's Hawk - Fort Deposit March 1 (PFC) 1st March record, 9th for State.
Bald Eagle - Montgomery March 10 (JEK).
Peregrine Falcon - Fort Morgan April 30 (JVP,TW) only one noted this spring.
Merlin - Birmingham March 24 (WRM); Dauphin March 26 (AGT); Gulf Shores April 15 (AOS).
Sora - Castleberry May 6 (CLK,LEG,MLM) latest LCP.
Black Rail - Gulf Shores May 13,14 calling repeatedly (TAI,JVP) 5th State record, may breed.
Purple Gallinule - 3 birds in 2 places near Castleberry (CLK,LEG,MLM) May 6, only date received LCP; Wheeler Refuge May 14,17,25 (WHF,JLD,DCH,JLW) 3rd Tenn. Valley.
Common Gallinule - 5 Castleberry March 17 (CLK,mob) earliest LCP.
American Oystercatcher - Dauphin (Grant's Pass) May 25, 2 eggs (REH) only State egg rcd.
Semipalmated Plover - Eufaula 3 April 25 (MF); Headland 4 May 9 (MF) 2nd and 3rd LCP; Wheeler Refuge up to 50 May 5-28 (DCH) maximum record inland.
Piping Plover - Wheeler Refuge 2 May 16 (DCH) 1st inland spring record.
American Golden Plover - Headland 3 April 11 (MF) 1st record LCP.
Black-bellied Plover - Wheeler Refuge 5 May 25 (DCH) latest spring Tennessee Valley.
Long-billed Curlew - Dauphin March 31 (LRT, 1st photo JAJ).
Upland Sandpiper - Tuscaloosa April 29 (JCT) latest spring UCP.
Solitary Sandpiper - Choctaw Refuge May 13 (CLK,KB,CP) latest spring LCP.
Pectoral Sandpiper - Up to 40 as late as May 28 Wheeler (DCH,JLW) latest spring TV; Headland May 9 (MF) latest LCP.
White-rumped Sandpiper - Headland May 9 (MF) 2nd record LCP.
Baird's Sandpiper - Alabama Point 3 May 14 (TAI,JVP) 2nd spring Gulf Coast; Wheeler Refuge 3 May 16-20, 4 May 21-23 (DCH) 1st spring Tennessee Valley.
Dunlin - 40 March 18 Eufaula (MF); 23 Wheeler May 24-25 (DCH) 1st spring Tenn. Valley.
Short-billed Dowitcher - Jacksonville 1 April 21 (WJC) 1st spring Mountain Region.
Long-billed Dowitcher - Wheeler 8 May 16 (DCH) 2nd inland spring record.
Semipalmated Sandpiper - Choctaw Refuge 8 May 13 (CLK,KB,CP) only spring record LCP.
Western Sandpiper - Headland 2 April 25 (MF); Choctaw Refuge 3 May 13 (CLK,KB,CP) only spring records LCP; Wheeler 7 May 16-18 (DCH,JLW) latest spring Tenn. Valley.
Buff-breasted Sandpiper - Fort Morgan April 30 (JVP,TW); Alabama Point May 14 (TAI,JVP); Swan Creek, Limestone Co., 2 May 3 (DCH); now 6 spring records for State.
Sanderling - Wheeler 7 May 16-18 (DCH,JLW) 1st spring Tennessee Valley.
Black-necked Stilt - noted 6 times on coast April 2 to May 12 (mob).
Red Phalarope - Bird photographed Sept. 12-15 at Lake Purdy (CSR,RCL) has been identified as a Red, so the Northern is still on the Alabama hypothetical list.
Laughing Gull - Headland April 25 (MF) 1st record LCP; 5 late at L. Oliver June 3 (LAW).
Bonaparte's Gull - L. Shelby, Gulf Shores, May 15 (TAI,JVP) latest State except TV.
Least Tern - L. Oliver 20 April 26 (LAW) 2nd spring Piedmont.
Ground Dove - Tuscaloosa April 21 (JCT).
Yellow-billed Cuckoo - Dauphin March 25 (LRT) earliest State.
Chimney Swift - Red Mtn., Birmingham, 5 March 12 (RDB) earliest Mtn. Region; Florida 4 March 17 (CLK,mob) earliest LCP.
Hummingbird Sp. - March 6, 9 Spring Hill (MAG).
Rufous Hummingbird - Fort Morgan April 5 (JVP,WRM,RR,FBT) 3rd State.
Western Kingbird - At least 4 records Dauphin and Fort Morgan April 5-30 (JVP,LRT,mob).
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher -- At least 5 records Dauphin April 5-14 (LRT,mob).
Acadian Flycatcher - Dauphin April 1-27, 14 birds banded (MEM).
Rough-winged Swallow - 2 Dauphin March 12 (GDJ) ties earliest Gulf Coast.
Barn Swallow - Tuscaloosa March 16 (JCT) earliest UCP; Choctaw Refuge May 26 (CLK,LEG, NB,MLM) latest LCP, but may really be a local breeder.
Cliff Swallow - 6 Florence March 30 (BGM,FB) earliest Tennessee Valley.
Red-breasted Nuthatch - Brewton March 31 (CLK,mob); Fort Morgan May 14 (TAI,JVP) latest State.
Robin - Fort Morgan a female May 14 (TAI,JVP) possibly a non-breeder.
Wood Thrush - Spring Hill March 3 (MWG) earliest State.

THOSE SOUNDLY SLEEPING SCREECH OWLS

Thomas Z. Atkeson and Harold Johnson

Black-whiskered Vireo - Fort Morgan banded April 15 (TAI); Dauphin banded April 24 (REH),
 1 seen May 14 (REH,DB); now 9 State records.
 Philadelphia Vireo - Dog R, Mobile, April 1 (LMCK) earliest State.
 Black-and-white Warbler - Dauphin March 12 (LRT,AGT).
 Prothonotary Warbler - Dauphin March 12 (LRT,AGT).
 Worm-eating Warbler - Dauphin March 17 (LRT) earliest State.
 Blue-winged Warbler - Dauphin March 22 (M&JM) earliest State.
 Nashville Warbler - Dauphin April 8 (LRT) ties earliest Gulf Coast.
 Tennessee Warbler - Fort Morgan May 14 (TAI,JVP) latest Gulf Coast.
 Parula Warbler - Dauphin March 5 (GC,REH).
 Yellow Warbler - Fort Morgan May 14 (TAI,JVP) ties latest State south of breeding range.
 Cape May Warbler - Dauphin May 21 (LRT) latest State
 Myrtle Warbler - Huntsville, a male May 26 (BGM),female June 9 (BGM,MLB,PS) latest State.
 Black-throated Blue Warbler - Dauphin April 8 (fide MAG) ties earliest State,1 Apr.24(LRT).
 Black-throated Green Warbler - Dauphin March 18 (REH) earliest Gulf Coast.
 Blackpoll Warbler - Eufaula April 16 (MF) earliest LCP.
 Louisiana Waterthrush - Dauphin March 3 (S&REH) earliest State; Lovick, Jefferson Co.,
 March 11 (DJH) earliest Mountain Region.
 Connecticut Warbler - Dauphin male banded May 4 (MEM) 2nd GC, 9th State spring records.
 Mourning Warbler - Jacksonville May 7 (WJC) earliest Mountain Region.
 Hooded Warbler - Abundant, see BANDING; Dauphin March 3 (S&REH) earliest State, April 5
 "saw more than in my whole life" (OSP).
 Bobolink - Dauphin April 14 (G&JM) earliest Gulf Coast.
 Yellow-headed Blackbird - Fort Morgan April 30 (JVP,TW) latest of 2 State spring records.
 Boat-tailed Grackle - Dothan 2 March 29 (MF).
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak - Immature male at Fairhope from previous period to March 11(A&MN).
 Black-headed Grosbeak - Fairhope female March 16 (JDW); Dauphin last seen April 12 (REH);
 Fairhope last seen May 3 (A&MN) latest State except UCP.
 Blue Grosbeak - Pollard, Escambia Co.,3 March 31 (CLK,mob) earliest LCP.
 Indigo Bunting - Dauphin May 31 (REH,SBH) latest GC.
 Evening Grosbeak - Fairhope female May 10 (A&MN) latest GC; Birmingham female May 15.
 at Mulga (L&MW) latest Mtn. Region except female June 6 Birmingham (RW).
 Pine Siskin - Birmingham 5 May 12 (HBT,IFS) ties latest for Mtn. Region.
 Red Crossbill - Bankhead Forest 5 March 1 (TAI,HHK), 6 possible family group May 5 (TAI).
 Savannah Sparrow - 2 Fort Morgan May 14 (TAI,JVP) latest Gulf Coast.
 Grasshopper Sparrow - Eufaula 1 March 18 (MF) latest LCP.
 Lark Sparrow - Dauphin April 14 (LRT,AGT) earliest Gulf Coast.
 Whitethroated Sparrow - Fairhope May 22 (A&MN) latest GC except a summer record.
 Swamp Sparrow - Bussey's Lake, Russell Co.,May 10 (JM) latest UCP.

Observers: Alabama Ornithological Society, Thomas Z. Atkeson, Raymond D. Bates, Kate Beck,
 Millicent Beck, Don Bland, Fred Bowman, Nell Broughton, William J. Calvert, Greg Carlisle,
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 Goodnight, David C. Hulse, Donald J. Hulsey, Richard E. (Tuck) Hayward, Sharon B. Hayward,
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 Idalene F. Snead, Genevieve and Jim Spafford, Lib R. Toenes, Alice G. Tait, Helen B.
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We had given little thought to the sleeping habits of Screech Owls (*Otus asio*);
 in fact, we had seldom thought of them at all except when we heard them a-screeching,
 until a Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) nest box program was begun on the Wheeler National
 Wildlife Refuge some years ago. Normally, these boxes are checked twice yearly, once
 in mid or late winter to insure that they are in good condition, properly located,
 etc., and again in late summer or early fall to determine the degree of use. Late
 summer checks indicate the little owls make some warm-weather use of the boxes, for
 unhatched Screech Owl eggs, feathers, rodent and fish bones, and other owl sign are
 found. It is the late winter check, though, that reveals the owls themselves, most
 of them sleeping like Rip Van Winkle. For example, a check of eighty-two boxes during
 the last week of January and first week of February, 1973, showed ten Screech Owls,
 seven red phase and three gray phase, inside the boxes in various states of somnolence.

Shortly after the system of mid or late winter box checks began some years ago,
 we began finding owls in the boxes so soundly asleep that they appeared dead, and it
 proved all but impossible to wake them. Invariably, these would be in a semi-standing
 position leaning in a corner of the box, eyes closed. You could play catch with the
 little rascals without rousing them. For example, Harold Johnson, a comparative new-
 comer, received his first experience with a winter box check in February 1971. Sure
 enough, there was a little red screechie in one of the first boxes he climbed to,
 sleeping soundly. Harold thought it would take first place in a cutie contest and
 was determined to show it to his wife, so he placed the sleeping beauty in his lunch
 box, hauled it around the remainder of the day and then home with him at the end of
 work-time. When he opened the lunch box, he found the little fellow hadn't turned a
 feather and was still snoozing peacefully. After he and Mrs. Johnson examined it at
 some length, they decided to wake it and release it. This proved easier said than
 done. There was much shaking, etc., before the owl roused enough to fly away.

After a number of similar examples of this sleepiness, we began to wonder if this
 was normal owl behavior or, perhaps, the torpidity that we had read about which affects
 southwestern Poorwill's and Andean Hummingbirds. We wrote Dr. Oliver Austin, editor
 of the AUK and curator of the Florida State Museum, about this and he suggested a
 check on temperature, respiration and heartbeat. By the time this correspondence
 had flowed back and forth, it was late February 1972 and weather was warm. We were
 determined to follow his instructions but to wait for the colder weather of 1973.

At 2 pm on January 9, after a nighttime low of twenty-four degrees and the
 thermometer then reading twenty-eight degrees, we decided to check an owl thoroughly.
 Sure enough, there was one in the first box examined that was thoroughly unconscious.
 Using a rectal thermometer borrowed from a local veterinarian, we recorded the body
 temperature as 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit. The respiration rate was 7.5 breaths per
 minute, though no heartbeat could be detected. We hauled the owlet to a Decatur
 veterinarian ten miles away.

"That thing can't be alive," the vet said as we laid it on his table. He
 attempted to find a heartbeat for us, but couldn't. We took our lethargic friend to
 the Wheeler Refuge office and left it there overnight with the thermostat set at
 about seventy-five degrees. When we returned at seven-thirty the next morning, we
 found him sitting there as bright-eyed and as bushy-tailed as any stumpy-tailed
 Screech Owl could be. We grabbed the little fellow and again took his body tempera-
 ture to find that it had risen to 103.4 degrees, and a re-check on his respiration
 rate in this alert stage showed that this,also,had risen to sixty-six breaths per
 minute. With the outside temperature twenty-five degrees Fahrenheit, we placed him
 outside in a box to see if he would go back to sleep, but he didn't. Determined to
 get a heartbeat reading, we carried him to a second Decatur veterinarian who was able
 to establish this as 120 beats per minute. Feeling that this one had suffered enough
 indignities to last any Screech Owl several lifetimes, we took him back to the
 vicinity of his bed box and released him.