

# ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

*Journal of the Alabama Ornithological Society*

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# ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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*Editor:* Dr. Bill Summerour, Biology Dept., Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL 36265

*Copy Editor:* Dr. George Richards, English Dept., Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL 36265

*Seasons Editor:* Dr. Greg D. Jackson, 2220 Baneberry Drive, Birmingham, AL 35244

*Counts Editor:* Dr. Thomas A. Imhof, 1036 Pike Road, Birmingham, AL 35218

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FIRST RECORD OF THE SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER  
(*CALIDRIS ACUMINATA*) IN ALABAMA

Thomas M. Haggerty and Glen N. Piper



Figure 1. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at farm pond near Leighton in north Alabama.  
(Photo by Ned Piper)

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) breeds in northern Siberia and winters from New Guinea, New Caledonia, and the Tonga Islands south to Australia. In western Alaska it is a casual spring and fairly common fall migrant, and is a rare but regular fall migrant along the entire Pacific coast of North America. It is considered a very rare migrant across the North American continent and most records are of juvenile birds in fall (AOU 1983, National Geographic Society 1983, Haymen et al. 1986). To the best of our knowledge, the following report documents at least the eighth spring record for North America, the second for eastern North America, and the first record for any season in Alabama (Table 1).

On 30 April 1988 at approximately 1030, Floyd Sherrod and the authors discovered a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at the edge of a three acre pond along County Road 22, approximately four miles west of Leighton, Colbert County, Alabama (Fig. 1). The pond receives waste runoff from

two large hog barns and is a regular feeding and resting site for migrating shorebirds. The bird associated with 24 Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*) and was last seen at 1930 on 1 May. During the two day period, approximately four hours of observations were made by the authors under excellent light conditions at a distance of 25–30 meters with 15–60x 40x spotting scopes, and 7 x 35 binoculars. The following description is compiled from notes and photographs taken during that period.

**Size:** Similar to that of a Pectoral Sandpiper but chunkier and slightly taller.

**Head:** Crown brownish red with fine dark streaks. Supercilium pale, and becoming broader and more distinct posterior to the eye. Eye ring pale contrasting with dark eye stripe that passed through the lores and broadened in the auricular region. Nape and hindneck finely streaked with black across a white background. Chin and throat finely streaked with black across a white background. Auricular region very finely streaked with brown across a buff background.

**Underparts:** Breast heavily marked with dark streaks, chevrons, and spots across an orange-buff background. Streaking turned to spots and chevrons on the lower breast and upper belly. Belly white; distinct chevrons and streaks continued along the flanks, vent, and undertail coverts across a white background. Lacked sharp line of demarcation between the streaked breast and unstreaked belly as seen in Pectoral Sandpiper.

**Upperparts:** Mantle feathers dark brown and fringed with buff or rust color. Mantle "V" rust colored. Scapulars dark brown with rusty fringe and contrasting with smaller grayish lesser coverts. Lesser coverts were fringed with white and gave proximal portion of folded wing a scaly appearance. Median coverts, greater coverts, and tertials dark brown and fringed with either buff or rust color. In flight, upperparts similar to Pectoral Sandpiper. Broad dark median stripe passed through the rump. Sides of rump white. Rectrices dark brown.

**Bill, legs and eyes:** Bill shorter than Pectoral Sandpiper's and slightly deeper at the base, but shape similar. In good light, bill two toned, with proximal third to one-half being yellowish and the rest black. Legs yellow but slightly longer than Pectoral Sandpiper's. Iris black.

**Behavior:** Foraging behavior similar to Pectoral Sandpiper. Pecked and probed in mud along edge of pond, but also foraged in water up to its "knees." On two occasions seen lowering its head in horizontal position and chasing a Pectoral Sandpiper a short distance (<1 meter).

**Similar Species:** The Pectoral Sandpiper is the species most similar

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to the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. The field marks that best distinguish the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper from the Pectoral Sandpiper are: (1) presence of spots and chevrons on the breast, sides, and crissum rather than the finer streaks that are found on just the breast and sides, (2) lack of a sharp demarcation between the markings on the breast and the unmarked belly, (3) bright rusty crown, mantle, and scapulars, and (4) bright buffy breast.

**TABLE 1. SPRING RECORDS FOR SHARP-TAILED SAND-PIPER IN NORTH AMERICA**

Location	Date	No. of Ind.	Citation
Alaska, Juneau.	17 May 1970	2	*AFN 24:634
Connecticut, Milford Pt.	8 May 1977	1	**AB 31:974
Canada, Alberta	23 May 1978	1	AB 32:1023
Canada, Saskatchewan	25 May 1980	1	AB 34:788
Alaska, Attu	26 May 1980	1	AB 34:806
California, Lancaster	5-9 May 1982	1	AB 36:894
California, Kern N.W.R.	8-10 May 1984	1	AB 38:960
Alabama, Muscle Shoals	30 April-1 May 1988	1	AB 42:447

\* AFN = Audubon Field Notes \*\* American Birds

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Paul Kittle and Greg Jackson who also made observations of the sandpiper and reviewed the manuscript.

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Haymen, P., J. Marchant, and T. Prater. 1986. *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide to The Waders of the World*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, Massachusetts.

National Geographic Society. 1983. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Nat. Geo. Soc., Washington, D.C.

Thomas M. Haggerty, Biology Department, University of North Alabama, Florence, Alabama 35632, and Glen N. Piper, 1302 Rush St., Tuscumbia, Alabama 35674.

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### FIRST RECORD OF THE CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD (*STELLULA CALLIOPE*) IN ALABAMA

Robert R. Sargent

On 5 October 1990 Elizabeth Williams of Mobile called to tell me that she had a hummingbird in her freezer that she found dead on 24 December 1989 at her neighbor's home south of Mobile. She said she found the bird on the floor of an outside alcove, apparently the victim of a severe cold spell that gripped Alabama for over a week and dropped the temperature in Mobile to near -18 C (0 F).

The specimen was delivered to me a week later, on 13 October, by Edith McClinton, who was attending the Alabama Ornithological Society meeting on Dauphin Island. My immediate impression upon seeing the specimen was that it was a Calliope Hummingbird (*Stellula calliope*). If after close study the bird turned out in fact to be a Calliope, it would be a new species for the state and the fourth species of hummingbird recorded in Alabama.

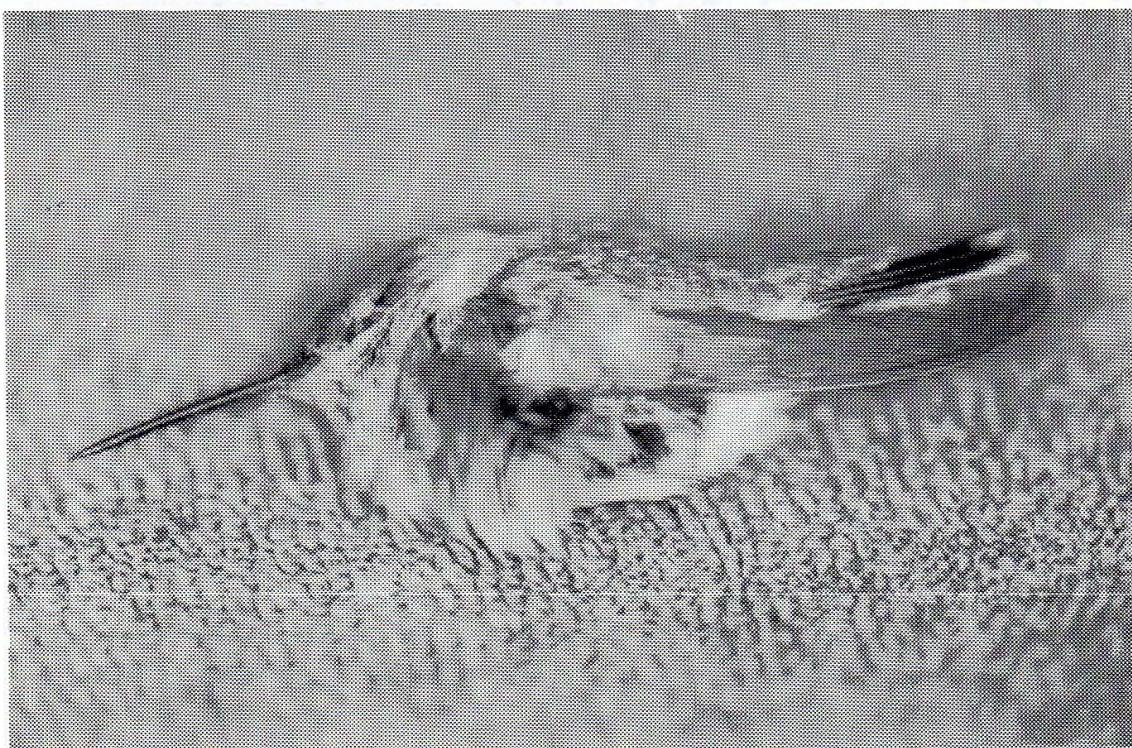


Figure 1. Calliope Hummingbird specimen found in Mobile 24 December 1989.  
(Photo by Robert R. Sargent)

Back home, with the aid of texts and a technical key given to me by Nancy Newfield of Metarie, Louisiana, and information from an unpublished study of the Calliope by Dr. William Baltosser of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, I was able to confirm that my initial identification was correct, that the specimen was indeed a Calliope Hummingbird, and probably a sub-adult female.

A close examination of the tail feathers revealed that the central rectrices were subspatulate in shape and the margins of the basal one-third reddish in color. The distal two-thirds was dark metallic green and the entire shaft red. It is the subspatulate shape that distinguishes the Calliope from all other hummingbirds, as shown below in Fig. 2.

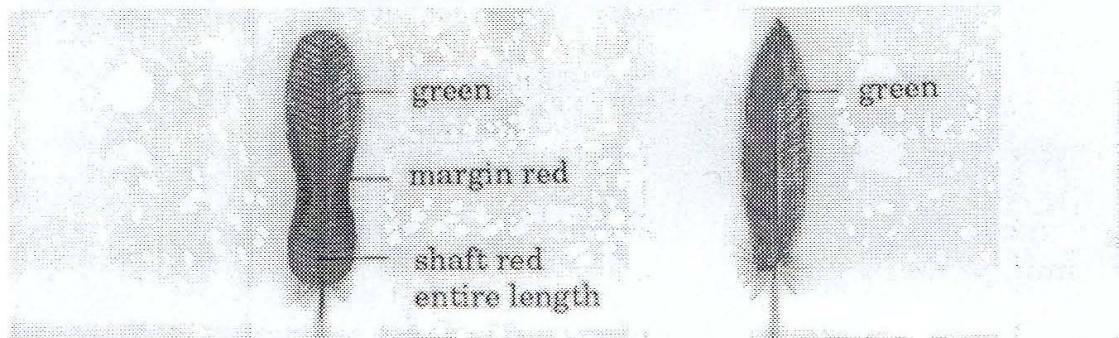


Figure 2. Comparison of a central rectrix of a Calliope Hummingbird (left) with that of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. (Illustrations by Bill Summerour)

In hummingbirds, the presence of striations in the upper bill indicates a hatching year bird. If the striations are deep and extensive, the bird is a juvenile. In transverse section the upper bill of this specimen had a rounded appearance with shallow striations near the base, indicating the bird was a sub-adult. By the first spring following hatching, all striations have disappeared and the bill is smooth (Baltosser, *North American Bird Bander*, 1987).

Since the specimen represented a first state record, the following description is given to document the record: *wing* 40.5 mm; *tail* 22.3 mm; *culmen* 15.3 mm; *weight* 2.37 grams; *bill width* at feather impingement 1.9 mm, short, straight and thin; *head* dull gray-green; *back* metallic bronze green (heavily bronzed); *tail* short, with arc-shaped reddish rufous color on the outside of the basal one-third (hidden by the tail coverts); *retrices nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5* with some white on tips; *retrix no. 1* black at tip; center of retrices green; shafts of retrices reddish; *breast and sides* bright buff with a cinnamon cast; *throat* grayish white, heavily spotted with bronze-green spots; *belly* cinnamon buff; *crissum* faint cinnamon buff. An additional observation was that the specimen's weight was near

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normal although it had been frozen for nine months. A photo of the specimen, compared with that of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, is shown in Fig. 3, below.

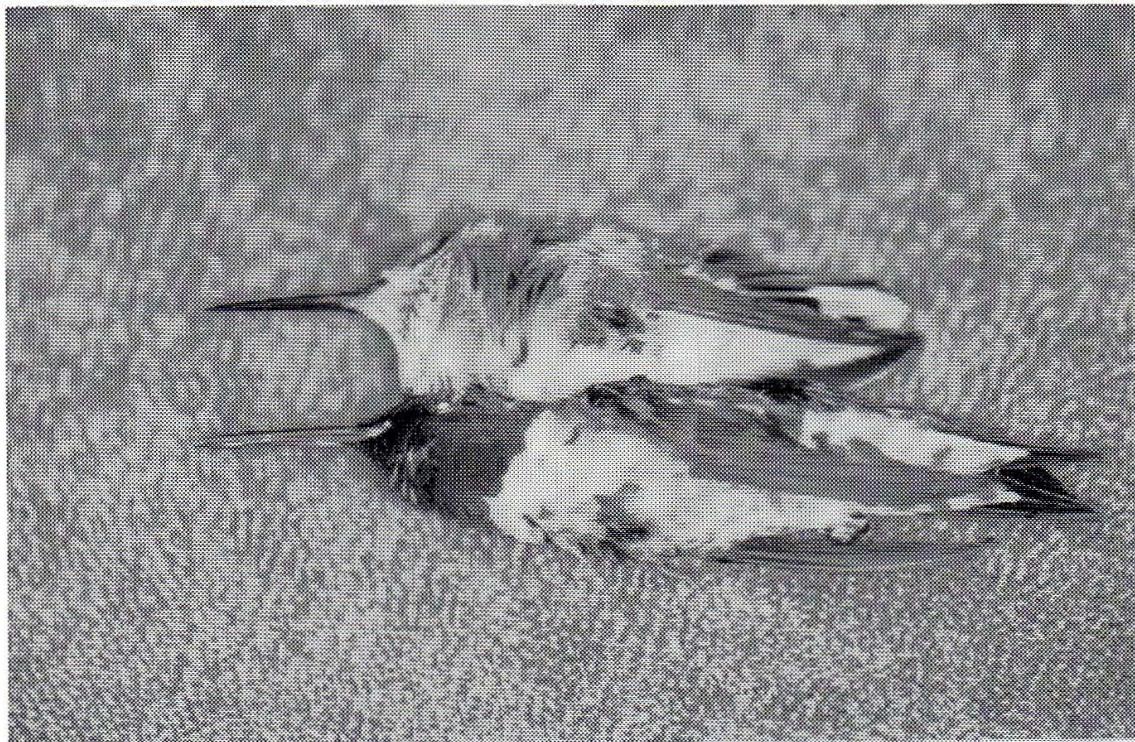


Figure 3. Comparison of Calliope Hummingbird (top) with a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. ( Photo by Robert R. Sargent)

At a feeder, or in the field, a Calliope would appear noticeably smaller than a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) and would have a reddish color at the base of the retrices. However, since the reddish color is difficult to see, and because female and immature Ruby-throated may also have buffy sides as does the Calliope, positive identification can be difficult. Adult males should be no problem, but female and immature Calliope are best verified in hand.

In the winter of 1989–1990 there were three records of Calliope wintering in the Southeast (*American Birds* Volume 44, No.4). On 18 December 1989 I banded one of these that was coming to a feeder in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. Another was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the third was in Alabama and is the subject of this paper.

The Calliope, like the Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) summers in the northwestern United States and western Canada. In many locations, both species are nesting when snow is still on the ground and nighttime temperatures are well below freezing. We now have

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enough banding records of Rufous Hummingbirds (over 50 in the Southeast) to know that they regularly winter here. The Calliope may be an occasional winter visitor also. These birds are well suited to cold weather, so leave your feeders up and watch closely, especially between September and April.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Nancy Newfield and Dr. William Baltosser for their help in identifying the specimen.

*Robert R. Sargent, Rt. 1 Box 558-G, Trussville, AL 35173.*

### FIRST NESTING RECORD OF THE SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*TYRANNUS FORFICATUS*) IN ALABAMA

Paul D. Kittle and Dee C. Patterson

Imhof (1976) considered the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) to be rare on migration and occasional in summer for inland Alabama. Nesting of this species in Alabama, however, had not been recorded. Successful nesting records in nearby southeastern states include those at Murfreesboro, TN (Jackson, 1984), Cartersville, GA (LeGrand, 1989), Laurens Co., SC (LeGrand, 1982), and Tupelo, MS (Jackson, Howell, and Werschkul, 1975). An unsuccessful nesting attempt by this species occurred in Hardin Co., TN, during the summer of 1990 (Damien Simbeck, pers. comm.).

The junior author and Dee Patterson observed a pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers constructing a nest on 30 June 1990. This nest was located 7.2 km west of Florence, Lauderdale Co., AL, and was checked approximately every other day for the next six weeks by the authors and other local birders. The nest was built in a slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*) at a height of approximately 10–12 m. This tree contained many dead branches, measured 40 cm in diameter, and was in a small grove of trees surrounded by open agricultural land. Approximately half of the surrounding land was cropland (cotton and soybeans) and half was a fallow field overgrown with thick weeds and grasses.

Nest building was observed on 30 June and 1 July. The female was observed sitting on the nest from 2 through 21 July. Feeding of nestlings

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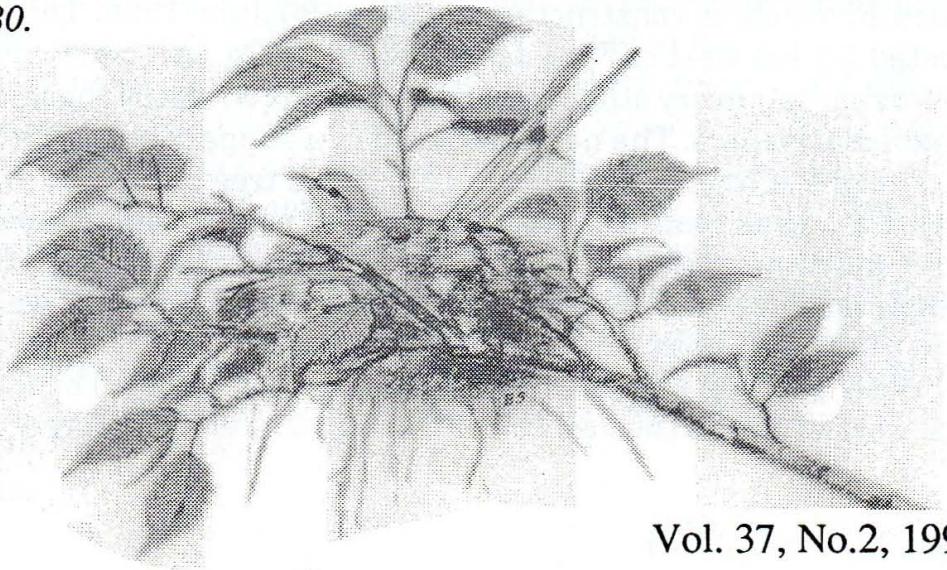
was first observed on 23 July and continued through 4 August. Three of the four young fledged on 5 August and the fourth fledged the next day. Young birds were still near the tree on 9 August, but had dispersed by 11 August. The male parent was observed near the nest tree on 17 August. The female and three young were observed 0.8 km west of the nest site on 3 September.

Individual Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were observed 2.1 km east and 0.8 km west of this nest site on 12 and 13 June 1989 (Imhof, 1989), which indicates that this species may have previously nested at this locality.

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*Paul D. Kittle, Department of Biology, University of North Alabama, Florence, AL 35632, and Dee C. Patterson, 1920 Monticello Rd., Florence, AL 35630.*



**MONK PARAKEETS (*MYIOPSITTA MONACHUS*)  
NESTING IN HUNTSVILLE**

Bill Summerour

Acting on a hearsay report of "green parrots" using a "huge" nest on a telephone pole in Huntsville, I called Bob and Martha Sargent of Birmingham and met with them and their daughter, Donna, in Huntsville to investigate the sighting.

We were taken to a suburban area in northeast Huntsville by a local resident who pointed out the large, domed nest placed on top of a transformer approximately 20 feet up on a telephone pole. In about 15 minutes a pair of parakeets showed up, squawking and screeching noisily and right away started cutting twigs from nearby trees and making trips back and forth to the nest as we watched and photographed them (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Monk Parakeet nest in Huntsville and birds with building material.  
(Photos by Bob Sargent)

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Some of the residents in the neighborhood said that two, and sometimes three, parakeets had been using the nest for at least three years (now four), but none knew for sure if any young had ever been raised. Benjie Blair, a student at Jacksonville State University, checked the nest this past May (1990) and said that House Sparrows and Starlings were using it, but the parrots were not seen. Later in the summer the sparrows and starlings were gone and the parakeets had returned.

At this writing nothing is known about the status of the Monk Parakeet in the Huntsville area. This is the first reported nest in Alabama and so far the only one known. There is a rumor of another nest in Madison, just west of Huntsville, and I have talked with other Huntsville residents who recall having seen "large green parakeets" flying over town as long as ten years ago. The evidence suggests that there may well be other parakeets nesting in Huntsville, and possibly in nearby towns as well.

Anyone interested in seeing the birds should contact me or the Sargents for directions.

*Bill Summerour, Biology Department, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL, 36265.*

## ATLANTA ARCHITECT DESIGNS HOUSING FOR BARN OWLS (*TYTO ALBA*)

Bill Summerour

Thanks to a conservation-minded Atlanta architect, Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) in the Atlanta area will have new nesting sites to choose from this spring. Keith Summerour of Gruber and Associates Architects, an Atlanta based architectural firm, has designed the housing for two pumping stations and has included accommodations in them for Barn Owls. Keith said he first got the idea in Europe where he had observed owl holes under the gables of 18th and 19th century barns.

One of the stations, now completed, is in Lake Peachtree near Peachtree City and the other will be constructed about 30 miles south of Atlanta in a wooded area near Line Creek. Both pumping stations are under the authority of the Fayette County Water Authority. The Peachtree Lake station is designed somewhat like a miniature castle with four

towers or turrets, one at each corner of the building. Each of the two towers facing the lake has an entrance hole for the owls, a 5 x 5 foot nesting platform 18 inches below the hole, and a perching bar for roosting.

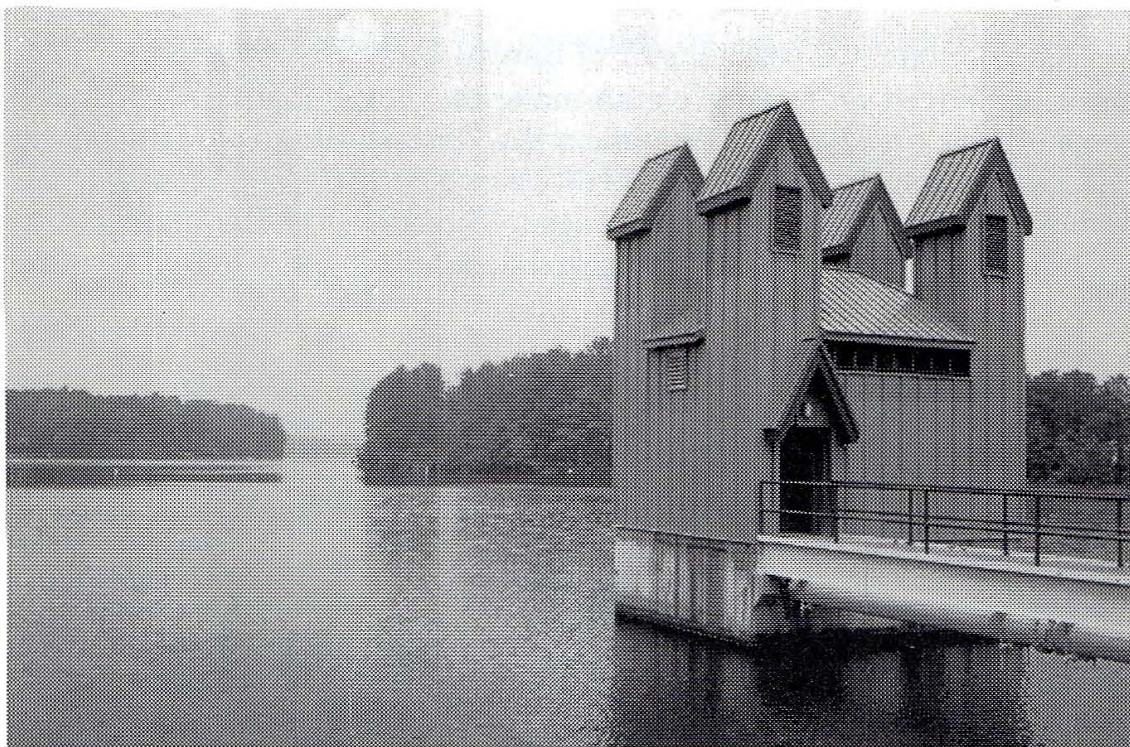
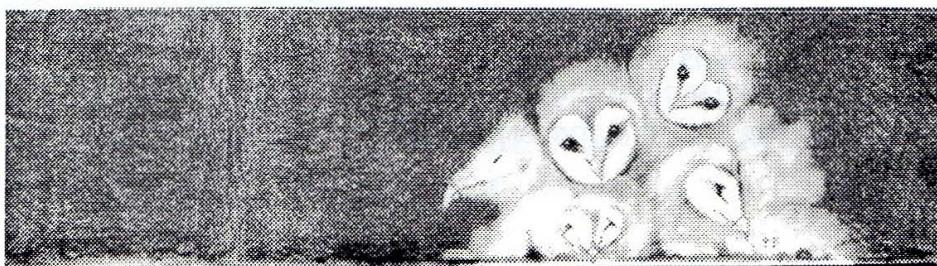


Figure 1. Pumping station with towers designed as nesting sites for Barn Owls. The two towers facing the lake have owl holes under the gables. (Photo by Eugene Britton)

A picture of the building accompanied by an article describing the design, and a description of the Barn Owl towers, has been published in the *Architectural Record*, a major architectural magazine. Future articles about the building will appear in other publications in December and April. In my view, the owls will need some help in finding the holes. If anyone has any ideas on how this might be done, or has any orphaned Barn Owls that need a home, contact *Keith Summerour, 1271B Kingsley Circle, Atlanta, GA 30324* or *Bill Summerour, Biology Dept., Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL 36265*.



**BARRED OWLS (*STRIX VARIA*) FLEDGED  
FROM NEST BOX IN MONTROSE**

Bill Summerour

For the past two years a pair of Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) has successfully fledged young from a man-made nest box in Montrose, near the home of Jack and Venetia Friend, on the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay. The owls raised one owlet in 1989 (*Alabama Birdlife*, 1989), and in the spring of 1990, two young were fledged. This year Venetia managed to get a picture of the two fledglings posed on a limb outside her window (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Young Barred Owls fledged from nesting box on the property of Jack and Venetia Friend of Montrose. (Photo by Venetia Friend)

In 1988, Howard and Larry Smith, who have a cabin on Guntersville Lake, constructed a box for a pair of Barred Owls (*Alabama Birdlife*, 1988), and placed it in a tree behind their cabin. Within a few weeks an owl moved in, but it was never known for sure if the box was ever used for nesting.

Judging from these two cases, although admittedly not exactly a large sample, it appears that Barred Owls are quite responsive to man-made nesting boxes, especially in areas where natural cavities are probably scarce. It is encouraging to know that these owls, usually associated with swamps and river bottoms, can adapt to wooded suburban areas, at least where there is ample cover and they are provided nesting sites.

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Anyone interested in owl boxes should contact Howard and Larry Smith, 804 13th Avenue, Jacksonville, AL 36265.

### Literature Cited

Smith, Larry. 1988. Barred Owls use nesting box. *Alabama Birdlife*, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 13.

Summerour, Bill. 1989. Barred Owls use box in Montrose. *Alabama Birdlife*, Vol. 36, No. 2, p. 15.

*Bill Summerour, Biology Dept., Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL 36265.*

### PREDICTING THE NEXT TEN SPECIES FOR ALABAMA

James F. Holmes

What will be the next species to be added to the Alabama state list? This question was probably easier to answer in March of 1990 as Alabama anticipated the unwanted visit of the Shiny Cowbird. Not only did the state get its first record of this species, but it came in large numbers.

Now, what will be the next species to be added to the state list? Better yet, what will be the next ten species to be documented within the state's borders? I posed this question to seven of Alabama's more active birders and received a large variety of ideas. The rules they had to follow were as follows: 1) they could not choose a species on the Alabama Records Committee Review List, 2) they could not choose a species to be reviewed by the committee (Shiny Cowbird) and 3) they had to rank their choices from one to ten, with one being the most likely.

Of the 33 choices made, only two received first place votes. Twelve choices could be grossly viewed as western, ten as northern, five as South Florida specialties, three as Mexican, two as European, and one pelagic.

The Purple Sandpiper, an Atlantic Coast rock-loving shorebird, received three first place votes and was on everyone's top ten. This species has occurred on the Mississippi Coast the past three winters and on the Louisiana Coast the past two. Although Alabama lacks extensive rocky shores, as Harriett Findlay states, "It's time one occurred in Alabama on some riprapping shore."

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The Buff-bellied Hummingbird received four first place votes but, interestingly, was absent from two lists. This species, a native of Mexico, ranges north to the Rio Grande Valley and regularly occurs in late fall and in winter in Louisiana. It has now occurred in Northwest Florida (three records) and in Mississippi. As Greg Jackson proclaims, "It is amazing that we don't have a record yet." Bob Sargent states, "This year" (1990-91). The general opinion is that this species is long overdue.

Other species receiving strong consideration were Black-headed Gull, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Varied Thrush, and Limpkin. All of these species have vagrant tendencies and have occurred in nearby states. The Limpkin is the most interesting as it regularly occurs very close to the Alabama border in Northwest Florida.

The final aspect that I asked them to consider was in picking an "off the wall" species. This was to be a species like La Sagra's Flycatcher or Wheatear. Interesting, choices came from Greg Jackson with Spotted Redshank, Harriett Findlay with Ross' Gull, and Ann Miller with Mongolian Plover. Thus when one of these three shows up in Alabama, you will know whom to contact.

Finally, I agreed to pick my top ten, but to limit myself to choose from species that had not already been chosen. This was at first a handicap, but I came up with 27 choices. My top ten from these are:

- |                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Red-naped Sapsucker      | 6. White-collared Swift     |
| 2. MacGillivray's Warbler   | 7. Western Wood Pewee       |
| 3. Lucy's Warbler           | 8. Lesser Goldfinch         |
| 4. Brown-crested Flycatcher | 9. Band-rumped Storm-Petrel |
| 5. Artic Tern               | 10. Bahama Swallow          |

Interestingly, before I could mail this article, a new species was discovered in Alabama. A Calliope Hummingbird was found dead in south Mobile this fall. Whose list was this on? Bob Sargent picked this hummingbird on his list. Who else?



**TABLE 1. SPECIES SUBMITTED AS POSSIBLE FUTURE ADDITIONS TO ALABAMA'S STATE LIST**

SPECIES	RD*	HF	BG	TI	GJ	AM	BS
Purple Sandpiper	4	1	7	1	4	1	2
Buff-Bellied Hummingbird	1	-	1	-	1	2	1
Common Black-headed Gull	-	-	8	3	5	3	-
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	5	-	5	9	2	-	-
Varied Thrush	2	6	9	-	8	8	-
Limpkin	-	-	3	5	-	-	3
Townsend's Solitaire	3	4	-	-	-	9	-
Eurasian Collared-Dove	-	-	2	-	3	-	-
Snow Bunting	7	7	6	-	10	-	-
Iceland Gull	-	2	10	10	-	-	-
Allen's Hummingbird	-	-	-	-	7	-	5
Thayer's Gull	-	-	-	-	6	6	-
Anna's Hummingbird	-	-	-	6	-	-	7
Lazuli Bunting	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Northern Shrike	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
California Gull	-	-	-	8	-	7	-
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Short-tailed Hawk	-	-	4	-	-	-	-
Hepatic Tanager	-	-	-	4	-	-	-
White-winged Crossbill	-	-	-	-	-	4	-
Townsend's Warbler	8	-	-	-	9	10	-
Trumpeter Swan	-	5	-	-	-	-	-
Vaux's Swift	-	-	-	-	-	5	-
Calliope Hummingbird	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Bar-tailed Godwit	6	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mountain Bluebird	-	-	-	7	-	-	-
Barrow's Goldeneye	-	8	-	-	-	-	-
Black-capped Chickadee	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
Tufted Duck	-	9	-	-	-	-	-
Scrub Jay	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Mangrove Cuckoo	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
Green Violet-ear	-	10	-	-	-	-	-
Yellow-nosed Albatross	10	-	-	-	-	-	-

\*RD, Robert Duncan; HF, Harriett Findlay; BG, Ben Garmon; TI, Thomas Imhof; GJ, Greg Jackson; AM, Ann Miller; BS, Bob Sargent.

*James F. Holmes, 912 Stoneridge Road, Birmingham, AL 35209.*

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### THE SAGA OF "OLE ONE-FOOT"

Robert A. Duncan

On 24 October 1977, I found an adult black-backed gull resting on a piling near the fishing pier at Ft. Morgan, AL. Shortly thereafter, it was observed by Tom and Joe Imhof, Lucy and Scot Duncan, Mary Lou Mattis and Roberta Bonwit. And so the saga of a long-lived and sometimes controversial gull began. The bird was identified, based on size, coloration and shape, as a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), a species with a history of vagrancy. The sighting was reported in *Alabama Birdlife* (1977, Vol. 25) as Alabama's first record of this species. On 30 October 1977, Lucy Duncan, Jerry Young and I located the bird again on the same piling and convinced an amused fisherman to take Lucy and Jerry out to the piling for a closer look so that a more accurate estimation of size could be made. Its right foot, which had been entangled in fishing line when originally found, was now severed. Thus, clearly marked for recognition, this unfortunate bird now paved the way for unequivocal observation (not identity!) along the northwest Florida and Alabama coasts. It is interesting to speculate, considering more than 20 sightings, the latest as recent as August 1990, what identifications of how many species would have been made in the 13 years since it was first discovered had it not lost its right foot!

On 17 September 1978, Charles D. Duncan (no relation), Ralph Havard, and Tuck Hayward found the gull at Dauphin Island, AL. and photographs were obtained. Charles Duncan's observation and study of photographs led to the conclusion that it was Alabama's first occurrence of a Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*) and was published in *American Birds* (1982, Vol. 36.)

Since the 1978 sighting, there have been no less than 25 reports in the Pensacola, FL area, primarily at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola and the downtown waterfront area. While it is not the purpose of this article to resurrect the question of this bird's identity, for most observers have long abandoned the attempt, I would like to summarize the sightings and some of the opinions expressed. Everyone now agrees it is not a Lesser Black-backed Gull. Some deduce that it is a Western Gull. I consider this a possibility except that this species has little if any history of vagrancy east of the west coast. The consensus is that it's a hybrid and I am strongly inclined to agree with that hypothesis. In recent years it has been found associating with an adult Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) in spring. Observers are generally in agreement on

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field marks originally described by Charles Duncan and me. I have observed the bird from as close as nine meters (30 feet) in excellent light in recent years and can only add that the periorbital ring is definitely pink, the eye best described as dull yellow, and size about 2.54 to 5.08 cm (one to two inches) smaller than adjacent Herring Gulls. A summary of sightings available to me since 1978 follows:

DATE	LOCATION	OBSERVER(S)
24 Nov 1980	Ft. Pickens	Lynn & Brooks Atherton (AB 35:193)*
22 April 1981	Ft. Pickens	Phil & Fred Tetlow (AB 35:833)
27 Nov 1981	Ft. Pickens	Robert A. Duncan
6 April 1982	Ft. Pickens	Wayne H. Valentine
7 April 1982	Ft. Pickens	Robert, Lucy & Scot Duncan
10 April 1982	Ft. Pickens	Owen Fang, Curtis Kingsbery, Ann & Tony Ziccardi (AB 36:862)
3 Dec 1982	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan (AB 37:310)
29 March 1983	Naval Air Station	Phil Tetlow
21 June 1983	Waterfront	Dick Ballman
8 July 1983	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan
20-29 April 1984	Waterfront and NAS	Paul Johnson, Robert A. Duncan et al.
8 Dec 1984	Naval Air Station	Paul Johnson
22 August 1984	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan
11 June 1985	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan
15 April-19 May 1985	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan
7 May 1986	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan (AB 39:312 & 40:484)
5 Feb 1987	Naval Air Station	Robert A. Duncan
14 Sept. 1987	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan (AB 42:89)
21 Dec. 1987	Naval Air Station	Paul Johnson
23-25 June 1988	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan, Henry M. Stevenson
16 May 1989	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan (AB 43:489)
30 August 1990	Waterfront	Robert A. Duncan

\*American Birds

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As the bird was at least four years old when discovered, it is now at least 17 years old and has been able to survive with one foot missing for 13 years! Its true identity may never be known, unless it is obliging enough to die of old age, disease or predation while being observed, in which case the specimen can be sent to experts for positive identification. Considering the history of this gull, there is no assurance that an "in hand" study would settle the matter!

*Robert A. Duncan, 614 Fairpoint Drive, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561.*

## 1990 SPRING SIGHTINGS

Greg D. Jackson

The spring of 1990 was productive for birders in the AOS area, with quite a few interesting species and generally good numbers of regular migrants. A first state record for Alabama, and a first western Panhandle record of the same species, were exciting, though the cheering subsides on learning of the type of bird that was recorded. More about that later.

Temperatures were normal for the season. Overall we had less rain than usual in most areas. Birmingham had a rainfall deficit of over five inches during the period, with a three inch deficiency in April. There were several fronts, though, that produced "fallouts" on the coast. Best birding days across the region were 17 and 30 Mar, 7 and 27-28 Apr, and 5-6 and 9 May. The most significant weather phenomenon this spring was the presence of strong east and southeast winds in the Gulf in late April and early May. This produced a relative abundance of a few species that usually migrate further to the east.

The following report covers the period March through May 1990 in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle (east to the Apalachicola River). The appearance of an observation in this column does not indicate verification or acceptance of a record for a very rare species, as this must be considered by the appropriate state records committee. Concerning the acceptance of sightings, it is essential that all submissions of birds that are unusual, either in general or for a particular season or region, be accompanied by adequate details of the observation. A list of species for which details are needed prior to publication appeared in the last issue of *The Yellowhammer*; a copy of this list can be obtained by writing me at the address below. Your help in this matter is appreciated.

County names are in italics. "WP" refers to the western Panhandle of Florida (Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa counties). Records not specifying Florida or "WP" are in Alabama. "\* ABRC" indicates sightings that will need evaluation by the Alabama Bird Records Committee. "mob" = many observers, "NS" = National Seashore, "NWR" = National Wildlife Refuge, "WMA" = Wildlife Management Area.

**LOONS - STORKS:** Common Loons often linger into the summer in small numbers on the coast; two were noted in *Santa Rosa*, Fla. 30 May (TAI,JTF). **Shearwaters** are rare in our region, so the discovery 13 Apr of 10-12 unidentified small shearwaters from shore in the Gulf Islands NS, *Santa Rosa*, Fla. (CAM,CLC) was exciting. American White Pelicans are regular near Mobile Bay in large numbers, but the estimated 200 at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* 28 Apr (GDJ,DGJ) was an unusual number for that location. Single American Bitterns were at separate sites in *Lauderdale* 31 Mar-1 Apr and 4 May (PDK,DEK); this species is difficult to find in northwest Alabama. Also locally rare were the one to three Least Bitterns noted in *Lauderdale* 4-11 May (PDK,DEK). Over 150 Yellow-crowned Night-Herons circling at dusk 15 Mar at Gulf Breeze, Fla. were an impressive sight (DB,JWB). Wood Storks are unusual in spring, so the occurrence of single birds in *Montgomery* 10-11 Apr and 30-31 May (AM,LG), and in *Elmore* 10 May (LG,AM,CM), was noteworthy. There were only three previous late winter to early spring records for Alabama.

**WATERFOWL:** Fourteen of the rare **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** were observed at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin* 28 Apr (PB,GF,AF,DF,mob). The sixth state record of **Ross' Goose** was provided by a single bird in *Perry* 11 Mar (GDJ,DGJ)(\* ABRC). Oldsquaws are unusual in spring, but this season I had several reports. The first was a single individual at Gulf Shores 22 Mar (PB). Three were seen 1 Apr in *Colbert* (GNP,mob), establishing a first spring record for northwest Alabama. A lone Oldsquaw was noted at Dauphin Island, *Mobile* 8 Apr (HHK,GA,mob) and 29 Apr (DM), the latter occurrence setting a new late record for the state. Even later was the Oldsquaw spotted in *Santa Rosa* 20 May (BM), establishing a new late WP record. A late inland Alabama record for White-winged Scoter was provided by the observation of three birds 18 Mar in *Colbert* (ALM,ADM).

**RAPTORS:** Seven Ospreys 29 Mar at Ft. Morgan (PB,GF) were noteworthy. Swallow-tailed Kites arrived in force, with 14 spotted 10 Mar in Pensacola, Fla. (JP) and seven seen 25 Mar at Ft. Morgan (PB,JL,PG). The eight Swallow-taileds 29 May in *Marengo* (RRS,MBS) equaled the previous state maximum. At the same location 29 May were

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approximately 65 Mississippi Kites (RRS,MBS), setting a new Alabama maximum. Two adult Bald Eagles returned to *Lauderdale* to build a nest at last year's site, and were thought to be incubating, but unfortunately abandoned the nest after 13 Mar (PDK,DEK). The Broad-winged Hawk at Ft. Morgan 17 Mar (PB,GF,JL,BB) was early. I had reports of only two Merlins from coastal *Baldwin* this season; singles were at Bon Secour NWR 21 Apr (EMW) and at Ft. Morgan 29 Apr (GDJ,DGJ). Peregrine Falcons are more difficult to locate in spring than autumn, so the solitary birds 16 Mar at Ft. Morgan (PB,GF) and 6 Apr on Dauphin Island (JH) were noteworthy.

**RAILS - SHOREBIRDS:** A **Black Rail** was flushed at close range at Ft. Morgan 28 Apr (AF,DF,G&JM) for the only report of the year of this elusive species. A King Rail was discovered 4 May in *Lauderdale* (PDK), yielding the first record of this species in northwest Alabama since 1911. Several reports of Piping Plover came from the outer coast this spring, with a high of seven at Ft. Morgan 24 Mar (PB,GF). Two American Oystercatchers, rare in *Baldwin*, were seen 21 Apr at Ft. Morgan (GDJ). The Black-necked Stilt 2 Mar in southern *Baldwin* (PB) was early and at an unusual spot. This distinctive species is even less common in the WP; noteworthy records included two in *Okaloosa* 6 Apr-24 May, one at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* 14 Apr, and two in Pensacola 17 Apr-18 May (all RAD). Quite unusual for the WP was the report of an American Avocet 3 May in Pensacola (RAD).

The two Baird's Sandpipers 26 Apr on the Ft. Morgan Peninsula (PB,GF) were a good find, as this species is difficult to locate in the spring. A Buff-breasted Sandpiper was very early 16 Mar at Ft. Morgan (PB,GF). Six Buff-breasteds were near Gulf Shores 28 Apr (GDJ,DGJ), establishing a new state maximum for the spring. The fourth local spring record for Long-billed Dowitcher was of a calling bird 9 Mar in *Okaloosa*, Fla. (DB,JWB). An American Woodcock 24 May in the same county (DMW) was quite late; this species is very rare along the coast in the summer.

**LARIDS:** An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was a great find at Ft. Morgan 3 May (JTF,BE) (\* ABRC); there are only three previous accepted records of this vagrant in Alabama, though reports will likely increase in the future. A third-year-type **Great Black-backed Gull** was noted at Ft. Morgan and Dauphin Island 3 Apr-3 May (RAD,JDJ,JTF,mob) (\* ABRC); this rarity appears to be gradually increasing in incidence in our area. Twenty Caspian Terns were located at Swan Creek WMA, *Limestone* 9 Apr (GDJ), tying the previous state maximum. An incredible report was of a **Brown Noddy** that landed in

a small boat with RWH and MVH in Mississippi Sound north of Dauphin Island 9 May (\* ABRC)! The exhausted bird was photographed and released on shore. This was the first spring record for Alabama and only the fourth overall; previous records have been associated with tropical storms, though weather in the Gulf that day was reported as "rough."

**DOVES - TYRANT FLYCATCHERS:** The only White-winged Dove record this spring was of one at Ft. Morgan 21 Apr (GDJ,DGJ,mob). A new late date for the Coastal Plain was provided by a Black-billed Cuckoo 28-30 May in *Montgomery* (EMW). Yellow-billed Cuckoos were "abundant" at Ft. Pickens, *Escambia*, Fla. 9 May (RAD). The Chuck-will's-widow 17 Mar at Ft. Pickens (DB,JWB) was a new early WP record. The Sargents banded a female **Black-chinned Hummingbird** 18 Apr at Ft. Morgan; though banding is certainly providing many more reports of this species, it is still rare in the spring. Early Great Crested Flycatchers included single birds at Ft. Morgan 10 Mar (PB,mob) and at Ft. Pickens, Fla. 17 Mar (DB,JWB). A Western Kingbird was an excellent find 5 May in *St. Clair* (RRR,ER); there have been only two previous spring reports from the Mountain Region, both at almost the same date as the present record. Gray Kingbirds are usually confined to the outer coast, so the reports of two pairs of nesting birds at different locations in Pensacola, Fla. (RAD,PT) were noteworthy.

**SWALLOWS - PIPITS:** The observation of a Northern Rough-winged Swallow 5 Mar in *Lee* (JH) tied the early date for the Coastal Plain. Two **Cave Swallows** were noted on Dauphin Island this spring, providing the seventh and eighth state records for this vagrant (\* ABRC). The first was 21 Apr (WCH,EB,MLG,GS,mob) and the second was 9 May (RWH,MVH). The latter bird was described as being very buffy underneath, and it is likely that both were of the nominate race breeding in the Caribbean and southern Florida. Early Barn Swallows were in *Montgomery* 10 Mar (JH) and at Ft. Morgan 13 Mar (PB,GF). Fish Crows continued to be spotted in the Mountain Region this spring, with the northernmost record in *Etowah* 26 Mar (JH). Bewick's Wren has become extremely difficult to find in our area, so the single bird noted 28 Apr in *Colbert* (PDK,WJR,AW) was a good find. A family of House Wrens was banded in *Jefferson* 19 May (RRS,MBS), providing the fourth record for successful nesting in the state. The American Robin in *Gulf Breeze*, Fla. 22 May (RAD) was quite late; this species is a rare breeder on the coast. Also late was an American Pipit at Ft. Morgan 21 Apr (GDJ,DGJ).

**VIREOS - WOOD WARBLERS:** A singing Bell's Vireo was lo-

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cated in *Jefferson* 5 May (TAI,WG,JG), establishing the fourth inland spring record for the state (\* ABRC). The Solitary Vireo noted 21 Apr at Ft. Morgan (PB) was late. Philadelphia Vireos are uncommon in the spring; two were discovered at Ft. Morgan 19 Apr (PB). The Red-eyed Vireo 17 Mar at Ft. Morgan (PB,GF,JL,BB) was early. Usually a few Black-whiskered Vireos are detected each spring. This season I had only one report of a bird at Ft. Pickens, Fla. 29 Apr (OEF); this is surprising given the strong southeast winds that were experienced on the coast. A bird fitting the description of a "backcross Brewster's" warbler was noted at Ft. Morgan 19 Apr (PB,GF,JH). The Orange-crowned Warbler spotted in Birmingham 6 May (GDJ) was late. Nashville Warblers are quite difficult to find in the spring, and this season I had one report of a bird 30 Apr at Ft. Pickens, Fla. (E&HB,TB). The two Northern Parulas at Ft. Morgan 3 Mar (PB,JL,PG) were early; nine of these tiny warblers were noted 10 Mar in *Montgomery* (LG), setting a new early arrival date for the Coastal Plain.

This was a super year for Cape May Warblers along the coast, with the higher-than-usual numbers likely related to the strong east and southeast winds in the Gulf. This species primarily migrates through peninsular Florida and then up the East Coast in spring. We usually see Cape Mays in small numbers, but this season they were plentiful; the 35 seen at Ft. Morgan 21 Apr (GDJ,DGJ,mob) provided a new state maximum. A lone bird 25 Mar at Ft. Morgan (PB,JL,PG) was early. Another eastern migrant, but one that is even less common in our area, is the Black-throated Blue Warbler. Several individuals of this species were noted on the coast in April and early May. Singles were at Ft. Morgan 19, 21, and 22 Apr (RRS,MBS,JH,DS,PB,mob); a late bird was at Ft. Pickens, Fla. 11 May (DB,JWB). At the other end of the spectrum was an alternate-plumaged male "**Audubon's**" Warbler 6 Apr on Dauphin Island (JH,HP,JM). This western form of the Yellow-rumped Warbler is quite rare in the region. An early WP record for Blackburnian Warbler was set by the discovery of three birds 17 Mar at Ft. Pickens (FW,mob). The Bay-breasted Warbler 15 Apr at Ft. Morgan (PB) provided an early date for the Gulf Coast.

During the second week of April sites along the coast experienced a good passage of Cerulean Warblers. An early Coastal Plain record was set by the observation of a Prothonotary Warbler 17 Mar in *Lee* (JH). The two Worm-eating Warblers 17 Mar at Ft. Pickens (TZ) provided a new arrival date for the WP. Also early was a Louisiana Waterthrush 10 Mar at Ft. Morgan (PB,mob). **Mourning Warblers** are rare in Alabama, and

generally pass through the state late in the spring. One was seen 17 and 23 May in *Colbert* (WJR), and another was found singing in *Jefferson* 26-30 May (PHF,HHK,RRR) (both \* ABRC). The latter occurrence represented a new late date for Alabama. Wilson's Warblers are unusual in the spring, so one at Ft. Morgan 19 Apr (PB) was interesting. The Canada Warbler spotted 14 May at Gulf Breeze, Fla. (DB,JWB) was late.

**GROSBEAKS - SPARROWS:** A Rose-breasted Grosbeak 29 Mar in *Jefferson* (RRS,MBS) established a new early date for the Mountain Region. A Dickcissel at a feeder in Montgomery 4 Mar-19 Apr (LG,AM) likely was a wintering bird; there is only one previous winter record for the Coastal Plain. Lark Sparrows are unusual in spring, and this season I had reports from Ft. Morgan of two birds 21 Apr (PB) and a single 28 Apr (OEF). One to two Grasshopper Sparrows, an uncommon wintering bird and migrant on the coast, were located at Ft. Morgan 10-21 Apr (DB,JWB,mob). The high count in *Montgomery* this season was 14 birds 1 May (EMW). A Lincoln's Sparrow was a good (and cooperative) find 28 Apr at Ft. Morgan (RRS,MBS,mob). The Dark-eyed Junco in Gulf Shores 30 Mar (PB) was late.

**BLACKBIRDS - CARDUELINE FINCHES:** The big news of the spring was the anticipated, and dreaded, invasion of **Shiny Cowbirds** into our area. This movement was likely assisted by the southeast winds in the Gulf. The species has been increasing alarmingly in southern Florida in the last few years, and a few had been discovered in 1989 as far north as the Carolinas and as far west as Louisiana. There were no previous records for Alabama or the WP, however. At least 43 birds were reported from the Alabama coast this spring (\* ABRC), beginning with a male at a feeder in Bon Secour NWR 25 Apr (JTF). The next day at Ft. Morgan three were located (PB,GF,mob), and the number increased to at least seven birds in the following days, some remaining to 12 May (RAD). In the Gulf Shores area, one bird was present 26 Apr (JTF) and four were noted 3 May (PB,GF). Dauphin Island's first Shiny Cowbird appeared 30 Apr (JH), and an amazing 28 were found there 11 May (RWH,MVH); some members of this flock lingered on the island into mid-June (RWH). A single male was at Ft. Pickens, Fla. 9 May (RAD). The second Alabama record of **Bronzed Cowbird** was of an individual 22 Apr at Ft. Morgan (JH) (\* ABRC); that site thus had the dubious honor of hosting three species of cowbirds in one week! I doubt that we have seen the last of either of these exotic parasites.

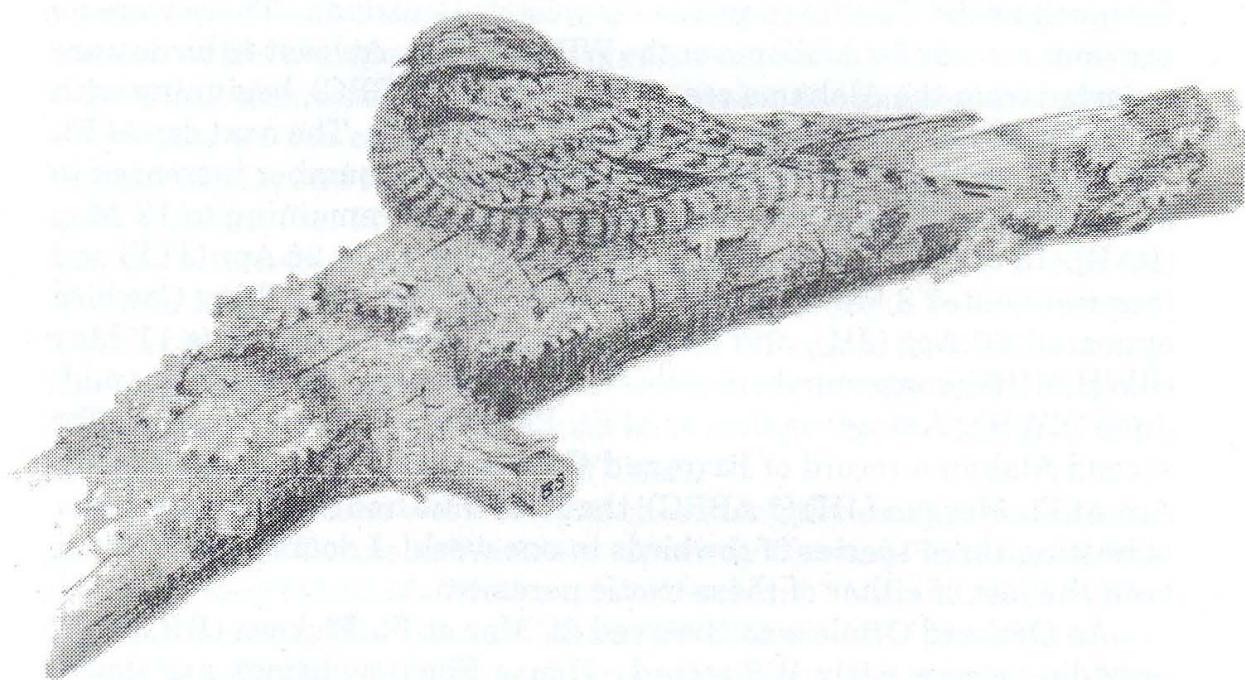
An Orchard Oriole was observed 21 Mar at Ft. Pickens (DB,JWB), providing a new early WP record. House Finch sightings are slowly increasing on the coast, and this spring birds remained in Pensacola, Fla.

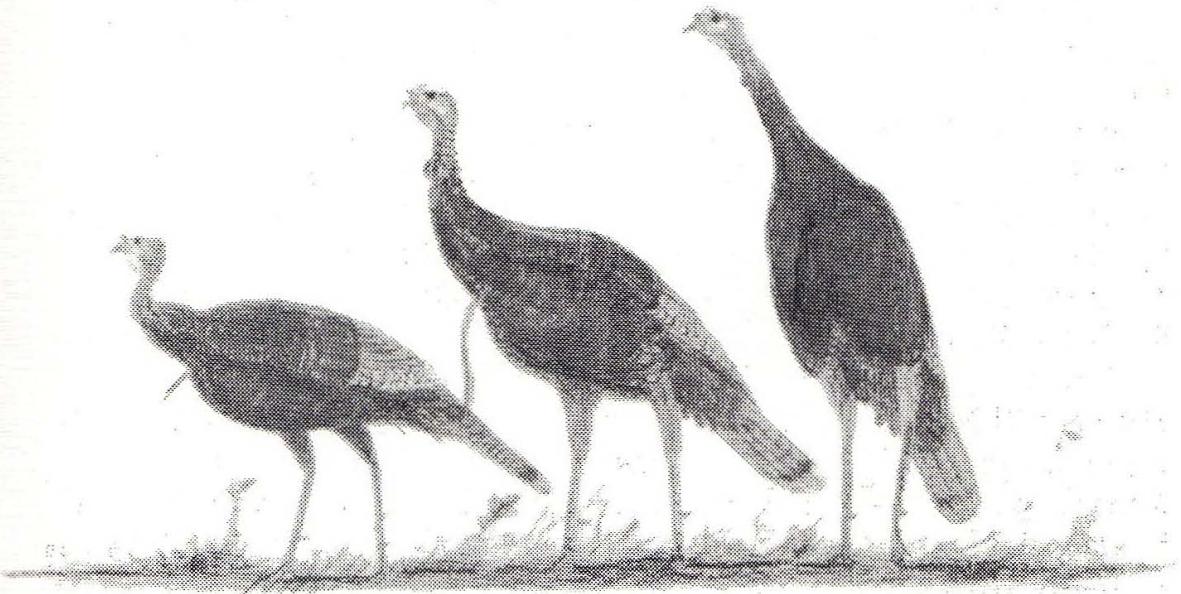
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to 5 May (J&LG) and 23 May (RAD). The three Pine Siskins observed in Jefferson 28 May (RRS,MBS) were the latest ever for Alabama.

**OBSERVERS:** Gussie Arnett, Dick Ballman, Jane W. Ballman, Evelyn & Howard Barbig, Tommy Barbig, Edward Barnsley, Paul Blevins, Bernice Brown, Cerise L. Cauthron, Robert A. Duncan, Bill Evans, Owen E. Fang, Harriett H. Findlay, Gene Fleming, Ann Forster, Dan Forster, Paul H. Franklin, John T. Fulton, Margaret Gallagher, Larry Gardella, Peggy Gibbs, James Gilliland, William Gilliland, Jay & Lyn Gould, Ralph W. Havard, Jim Holmes, William C. Hunter, Thomas A. Imhof, Debra G. Jackson, Greg D. Jackson, Helen H. Kittinger, Donna E. Kittle, Paul D. Kittle, Jan Lloyd, Jeff Madden, Curtis A. Marantz, Andrea Menyhert, Colene Menyhert, Al D. Miller, Ann L. Miller, Dottie Miller, Bill Milmore, George & Jane Monheit, James Pfeiffer, G. Ned Piper, Hugh Powell, Elouise Rafferty, Robert R. Reid, William J. Rogers, Martha B. Sargent, Robert R. Sargent, Georgann Schmalz, Dana Southard, Phil Tetlow, Mark Van Hoose, Fred Wicke, Donald M. Ware, Anthony Watkins, Erika M. Wilson, Tony Zicardi.

*Greg D. Jackson, 2220 Baneberry Drive, Birmingham, AL 35244.*





### Note from the Editor

I will be in Virginia from January through May 1991. To save time, submit articles for publication in *Alabama Birdlife* to the Biology Department, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, VA 24450. After 1 May send them as usual to Jacksonville State University. All articles must be typed, double-spaced, and submitted exactly as you want them to appear in *Alabama Birdlife*. My work number at V.M.I. will be (703) 464-7247 and at night (703) 463-3699. The deadline for the next issue will be about 30 June.

If you are in the vicinity of Lexington, call or come by to visit and maybe we can find time to look for Tree Sparrows or Snow Buntings or whatever locally, or Purple Sandpipers, Brant, Ipswich Sparrows and a lot more over on the coast.

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Bill Summerour, Editor  
*Alabama Birdlife*  
Biology Department  
Jacksonville State University  
Jacksonville, AL 36265

