

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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,GDJ,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-

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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.

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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 Ziccardi.

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

