

FALL SIGHTINGS (AUGUST-NOVEMBER 2003)

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This report covers the period from August through November 2003 in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle (west of the Apalachicola River). The appearance of observations in this article does not suggest verification or acceptance of records for very rare species; these must be considered by the appropriate state records committees. All submissions of birds that are rare, either in general or for a particular season or region, must 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. For guidance, observers are encouraged to consult the Alabama Ornithological Society checklist. Reports should note conditions of observation and the diagnostic characters observed. Your help in this matter is appreciated.

Abbreviations and italics: County names are in italics and, except for the Western Panhandle counties of Florida, are in Alabama. “@” = under review by; “ABRC” = Alabama Bird Records Committee; “b.” = banded; “FOSRC” = Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee; “FWBSF” = Fort Walton Beach Spray Fields; “m.ob.” = many observers; “NF” = National Forest; “NWR” = National Wildlife Refuge; “ph.” = photographed; “SP” = State Park; “vt.” = videotaped; “WMA” = Wildlife Management Area; “WP” = Western Panhandle of Florida (Bay, Gulf, Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties); “WTF” = Woerner Turf Farm.

PACIFIC LOON – Rare but regular on Guntersville Reservoir (*Marshall*), one was noted 21-22 November (Dick Reynolds, Steve McConnell et al.).

RED-NECKED GREBE – Dick and Linda Reynolds found a single on Guntersville Reservoir, *Marshall* 21 November that established the 12th record for Alabama (@ABRC).

EARED GREBE – At the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 1-3 birds were present 4 October – 30 November (Alan Knothe, Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown et al.) (rare but regular in WP). Some attendees of the fall meeting of the Alabama Ornithological Society meeting on Dauphin Island were treated to the sighting of a single at Bayou La Batre, *Mobile* 12-14 October (uncommon in Alabama).

MASKED BOOBY – The second September record for the WP was set by a bird found on Choctawhatchee Bay, *Okaloosa* 12 September (Bev Goode).

A sub-adult was spotted by Ben Garmon and Howard Horne on the east end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile* 16 September. This species is rare in Alabama, especially onshore.

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN – This species is locally rare in inland Alabama, but there has been a recent increase in records, some of large numbers of birds. Linda and Winston Baker reported 200 from Weiss Lake, *Cherokee* 22 October. Because of the close proximity of Wheeler NWR and Swan Creek WMA, *Limestone*, there may be some overlap of birds in the following records, but numbers were impressive nevertheless: Wheeler NWR, 409 on 27 October (CDC, m.ob.) (maximum count for both Tennessee Valley and inland Alabama), 18 on 8 November (Bob Reid), 11 on 13 November (Damien Simbeck), and 135 on 29 November (Barry Fleming); Swan Creek WMA, 89 on 25 October (Dick Bruer, Bob Reid), and 168 on 1 November (Steve McConnell, Dick Bruer, Dick Reynolds). An additional Tennessee Valley record came from Town Creek Marsh, Colbert, 8 birds 4 November (Helen Kittinger, Martha Dagg) and 7 November (Shirley Wayland et al.). Much farther south than the above records was a single at Speigner, *Elmore*, 23 November (Larry Gardella).

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD – A late bird was spotted at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* 30 November (Rack Cross).

ARDEIDS – Unusually high numbers of herons and egrets were present August – mid-September throughout the WP (Bob Duncan).

AMERICAN BITTERN – Rarely seen in the Mountain Region, a single was found at Porter Lake, *Jefferson* 27 September (Sharon Hudgins, David George). Probably uncommon on the Inland Coastal Plain and rarely reported, one was noted at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour* 13 November (Carolyn Snow, Lorna West).

SNOWY EGRET – One was in *Jefferson* 27 September (Helen Kittinger, R. D. Kittinger) (rare in Mountain Region).

REDDISH EGRET – An immature white morph individual was seen on Little Dauphin Island, *Mobile* 24 August (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson). This morph is rarely seen in Alabama.

CATTLE EGRET – The 50 counted at Montgomery, *Montgomery* 18 November (Carolyn Snow, Phil Snow), were late.

GLOSSY IBIS – Ten at Blakeley Island, *Mobile* 24 August (Greg Jackson) was a good number.

WHITE-FACED IBIS – One at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 2 October was the 15th for Alabama (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan; @ABRC).

- PLEGADIS SP.** – An estimated 30 on the Mobile Causeway, *Mobile* 24 August (Greg Jackson) was the second highest count of any *Plegadis* in Alabama.
- ROSEATE SPOONBILL** – Presumably the same individual was seen on two dates at Bayou La Batre, *Mobile* 4 September (Andrew Haffenden) and 10 September (David Dortch) (26th Alabama record).
- WOOD STORK** – This species is rare on the Gulf Coast, so the two seen at Bottle Creek in the Mobile Delta, *Baldwin* 28 September (Patrick Bolton) were notable.
- GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** – Jean Williams found 65 at Niceville, *Okaloosa* 22 October, perhaps part of a large flight that occurred along the Gulf Coast that day (see Fort Morgan record below). Two birds were noted at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 15 November (Don Ware, m.ob.). Record numbers occurred in Alabama this fall. An estimated 510 in four skeins were seen flying west at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 22 October, a new maximum for Alabama (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Cecil Brown). A maximum for inland Alabama (65) occurred at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone* 29 November (Barry Fleming), with 7-64 being counted at the same site on various dates between 13-22 November (Damien Simbeck, Harry Dean, Birmingham Audubon Society, m.ob.). Two adults and one immature were found at Styx River, *Baldwin* 30 November (Claire Krusko) where the species is locally rare.
- ROSS'S GOOSE** – At the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, three-five birds occurred 15-28 November (Don Ware, Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Alan Sheppard, Cecil Brown, ph. by Jean Williams) (@FOSRC). This goose is rare but expected at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone*, and three were spotted there 13 November (Damien Simbeck) and six on 15 November (Harry Dean, m.ob.). Rare on the Gulf Coast, two were found at Blakeley Island, *Mobile* 16 November (Howard Horne, Ben Garmon).
- EURASIAN WIGEON** – An adult male was found at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour* 13 November (Carolyn Snow, Lorna West) to set the seventh record for Alabama (@ABRC).
- SWALLOW-TAILED KITE** – A new maximum for the WP, over 150 in two kettles were noted during rainy conditions at Molino, *Escambia* 7 August (Gene Fleming, Frank Logan).
- SHORT-TAILED HAWK** – The first record of this species for Alabama was set by the sighting of an immature dark morph individual at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 15-16 October (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Betsy Tetlow, Cecil Brown, Ann Miller, Bill Summerour et al.; ph. Lucy Duncan, Ann Miller;

@ARBC).

GOLDEN EAGLE – The earliest fall migrant ever for the WP, an adult bird spotted by Bob and Lucy Duncan, was at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* 28 September. An adult also occurred at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 7 October (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown). A single immature was in Bay 31 October (Bob Landry). This raptor is casual in the WP. Rare and early for the Tennessee Valley, one adult was found at Lake Guntersville SP, *Marshall* 27 October (Dick Reynolds).

BLACK RAIL – One was flushed from short grass at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 17 November (Lucy Duncan, Cecil Brown, Bob Duncan) to establish the 12th record for the WP.

SORA – During a fall Birmingham area bird count on 27 September, Sharon Hudgins et al. managed to tally seven, with six at Porter Lake and a single at the Birmingham Airport, both *Jefferson* (maximum count for Mountain Region). Two were late at Porter Lake, *Jefferson* 30 November (Sharon Hudgins, David George) (rare in winter in the Mountain Region).

SANDHILL CRANE – Robert Reed found 11 at Tallassee, *Elmore* 20 November, where the species is locally rare. Good numbers of 85 and 160 were counted at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone* 22 November (Dwight Cooley, Birmingham Audubon Society) and 29 November (Barry Fleming), respectively.

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER – A single was early for the Tennessee Valley near Leighton, *Colbert* 17 August (Steve McConnell et al.), while another single was early for the Mountain Region at Harpersville, *Shelby* 20 August (Harriett Wright, Alice Christenson).

KILLDEER – Good numbers of this plover, an actual count of 250 and an estimated 500, respectively, were recorded near Leighton, *Colbert* 15 August (Damien Simbeck) and at the WTF, *Lowndes* 24 August (Larry Gardella).

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER – One was at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* 11 October (Ann Miller) where the species is locally rare. Thirty were at Coden, *Mobile* 30 November (Rack Cross), a good number for this location.

AMERICAN AVOCET – Damien Simbeck noted a single near Leighton, *Colbert* 27 August – 4 September. This shorebird is rare in inland Alabama.

MARbled GODWIT – Rare in the WP, three were noted at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 5 August (Bob Duncan) and five were found at Pensacola Beach, *Escambia* 23 August (Carol Ascherfeld, Ray Ascherfeld). One was photographed at Seven Mile Island in the Tennessee River near Florence, *Lauderdale* 19 September (Steve Hacker) (occasional for inland Alabama).

- SANDERLING** – Rare in the Mountain Region, one was spotted at Porter Lake, *Jefferson* 27 September (Sharon Hudgins, David George).
- WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER** – Rarely seen in fall, a single was at Blakeley Island, *Mobile* 15 August (Larry Gardella).
- BAIRD'S SANDPIPER** – Bob Reid had two at the WTF, *Lowndes* 18 August (rare on the Inland Coastal Plain). This species is rare but regular in the Tennessee Valley in fall, and singles were recorded at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone* 21 September (Dick Reynolds, Dick Bruer, Harry Dean) and at Swan Creek WMA, *Limestone* 31 October (Steve McConnell).
- PECTORAL SANDPIPER** – A new maximum count (700+) for Alabama was made at the WTF, *Lowndes* 24 August (Larry Gardella).
- RUFF** – A single male was observed at Swan Creek WMA, *Limestone* 25 October (Dick Reynolds, Dick Bruer) to establish the sixth record for Alabama (@ABRC).
- LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** – Rare inland in fall, one was near Leighton, *Colbert* 15 August (Damien Simbeck), while another single was at the WTF, *Lowndes* 24 August (Larry Gardella) (occasional on the Inland Coastal Plain).
- POMARINE JAEGER** – A single was on Pelican Island, *Mobile* 14 October (David Dortch; ph.). This species is rare onshore in Alabama.
- PARASITIC JAEGER** – Bob Duncan established the third fall and 12th overall record for the WP with a juvenile at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 22 September.
- LAUGHING GULL** – An adult was at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale* 26 November (Damien Simbeck) where the species is rare but regular.
- FRANKLIN'S GULL** – Seventeen, a maximum for inland Alabama, were seen at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale* 21 October, with singles 23 October and 25 November, and seven 31 October (Damien Simbeck et al.). This species is rare but regular at this site. Franklin's Gull is rare on the Gulf Coast, so a first-year bird at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* 23 October (Ann Miller, Al Miller), an adult at the east end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile* 23 October (Ben Garmon), and another first-year bird at Destin, *Okaloosa* 23 October (Alan Knothe, Larry Marler) were noteworthy.
- CALIFORNIA GULL** – A first-year bird at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale* set the fourth Alabama record (Damien Simbeck et al.; ph.; @ABRC). It was seen 8 and 17 October, 14 November, and 6 and 9 February (2004).
- LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** – Rare but increasing in Alabama, a first-year single was seen at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale* 29 October, 16 November, and 6 February (2004), with two present on 9 February (Damien Simbeck et al.). A single adult was present at this same site 4

November (Damien Simbeck). Another adult was on Pelican Island, *Mobile* 7 November (David Dortch, Bill Summerour, Betty Summerour).

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL – An adult was on Pelican Island, *Mobile* 5 November (David Dortch) and 7 November (David Dortch, Bill Summerour, Betty Summerour) (ph.). This species is still rare in Alabama.

SOOTY TERN – Bob Duncan found a single adult at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 5 August where the species is casual. Rare onshore in Alabama, but regular near Dauphin Island in recent years, an immature was seen from the Dauphin Island Ferry, *Mobile* 18 August (Steve Walker).

WHITE-WINGED DOVE – Bob and Lucy Duncan had up to 12 adults and four juveniles at their feeder in Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* 20 August – 18 September, further evidence of breeding activity in the WP.

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO – One was found at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert* 3 October (Damien Simbeck et al.) (rare inland).

GROOVE-BILLED ANI – Rare but regular in the WP, singles were at Destin, *Okaloosa* 4 October (Lenny Fenimore, Don Ware et al.); Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 6 October – 5 November (Alan Sheppard, Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, m.ob., ph. by Jean Williams); and Cantonment, *Escambia* 30 November (Cheryl Greene). Rare and erratic on the coast of Alabama, one was spotted at the Goat Tree on Dauphin Island, *Mobile* 15 October (Ben Garmon).

FLAMMULATED OWL – A bird found injured but alive in Mobile, *Mobile* 31 October (Julie Perez) was rehabilitated and later flown to California for release. This is the first record of the species for Alabama (ph.; @ABRC).

LESSER NIGHTHAWK – The fifth record for Alabama was set by a single on Pelican Island, *Mobile* 6 November (David Dortch) (@ABRC).

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD – One was at Niceville, *Okaloosa* 23 November (Fred Bassett). A single first noted 24 November at Fairhope, *Baldwin* (David Dortch) was banded 4 December (Fred Bassett) (vt.; @ABRC) to mark the 15th Alabama record.

CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD – An immature male was first noted at a residence in Birmingham, *Jefferson*, during the last week in October and remained until mid-February, 2004 (Bob Sargent et al.; @ABRC) to set the 20th Alabama record.

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD – One was banded at Crestview, *Okaloosa* 24 November (Fred Bassett).

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER – Rare but regular in fall, two were seen at Russellville, *Franklin* 4 September (Damien Simbeck). A single was noted

at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 9 September (Bill Summerour).

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER – At Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, where this species is rare but regular, a single was present 5 September while two were noted on both 18 and 26 September (Damien Simbeck et al.). Also rare but regular in the Mountain Region, one was found at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, *Jefferson* 23 September (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson). Singles were banded in the Tuskegee NF, *Macon*, on 17, 23, and 24 September (Ashley King, Christopher Burney), and another single was recorded at Powder Magazine Park, Montgomery, *Montgomery* 3 October (Larry Gardella) (rare on the Inland Coastal Plain). On the Gulf Coast of Alabama, where this *Empidonax* is rare but regular, the following records were received: singles at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 4 October (Bob Sargent, et al.; b.) and 11 October (Greg Jackson, Steve McConnell, Jeff Wilson et al.); Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, one on 11 October (Greg Jackson, Stan Hamilton) and three on 12 October (Ben Garmon).

“TRAILL’S FLYCATCHER” – A late bird was at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert* 7 October (Damien Simbeck).

SAY’S PHOEBE – The first WP record was established by one found at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 13-15 October (Barry Fleming, m.ob.; ph.; @FOSRC).

VERMILION FLYCATCHER – Casual in the WP, an adult male was found at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 22 November (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow, Dawn John). Another adult male was on the Mobile Causeway, *Mobile* 10 October (Larry Gardella).

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER – One was at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* 5 September (Bob Duncan), another was found at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 23 October (Alan Knothe, Larry Marler), and a third individual was recorded at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 29 October (Cecil Brown, Sam Tagatz, Bob Duncan et al.) (over 20 WP records). One was at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 15 October (Bob Sargent, et al.; b.; ph.) where the species is rare.

WESTERN KINGBIRD – An early arrival was at Dauphin Island Airport, *Mobile* 10 August (Ben Garmon).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER – Rare but increasing as a breeder, an adult was at Lake Land Farms, *Marion* 17 August (Ben Garmon), and a new maximum (10) for Alabama was established on Dauphin Island, *Mobile* 14 October (Dick Reynolds, Linda Reynolds).

BELL’S VIREO – Rare in Alabama, one was seen at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 11 October (Jeff Wilson).

WARBLING VIREO – Two were banded at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 6 October

(Bob Sargent et al.) (rare in Alabama).

YELLOW-GREEN VIREO – The first Alabama record for the species was established by a bird at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 10 October (Duane Berger, Fred Bassett, Bob Sargent et al.; b.; ph.; @ABRC).

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH – Three were noted at Oak Park in Montgomery, *Montgomery* 26 September (Larry Gardella) (rare for Inland Coastal Plain).

BROWN CREEPER – Rare in the WP, one was found at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* 8 November (Bob Duncan).

HOUSE WREN – A singing bird that was recorded at Irondale, *Jefferson* 4 August (Helen Kittinger), may indicate nesting.

WOOD THRUSH – A maximum fall count for Alabama was made 16 October when Larry Gardella heard 147 nocturnal migrants at Montgomery, *Montgomery*.

SAGE THRASHER – One was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 23 October (Alan Knothe, Larry Marler) to establish the fifth WP record.

YELLOW WAGTAIL – Another first state record for Alabama was established by an immature found at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 29 September (Bob Duncan, David Dortch, Cecil Brown, m.ob.; @ABRC).

CEDAR WAXWING – A rare but increasing breeder, one was found at Decatur, *Morgan* 11 August (Steve McConnell). Eleven were noted at Russell Cave National Monument, *Jackson* 6 August (Barbara Stedman).

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER – Good numbers of this species were seen at Opelika, *Lee*, with a total of 16 between 6 September and 14 October and with a maximum of three on 25 September (Lorna West).

“BREWSTER’S” WARBLER – Singles were seen at Opelika, *Lee* 8 and 16 September (Lorna West) (rare in Alabama).

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER – Early birds were at Dauphin Island, *Mobile* 15 September (David Dortch) and Opelika, *Lee* 17 September (Lorna West).

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER – This warbler is rare in inland Alabama, but two reports were received: one female, Trussville, *Jefferson* 27 September (Greg Harber), and one male at Coleman Lake, Talladega NF, *Cleburne* 25 October (Greg Harber, Edith Hunt).

BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER – A new maximum fall count (five) for the Inland Coastal Plain was made at Fort Toulouse, *Montgomery* 3 October (Larry Gardella).

KIRTLAND’S WARBLER – The second WP record, and the first since 1953,