

WINTER SIGHTINGS (DECEMBER 2003 – FEBRUARY 2004)**Paul D. Kittle, Greg D. Jackson, and Robert A. Duncan**

This report covers the period from December 2003 through February 2004 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 Florida counties of *Bay*, *Escambia*, *Gulf*, *Okaloosa*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Walton*, are in Alabama. “@” = under review by; “ABRC” = Alabama Bird Records Committee; “b.” = banded; “CBC” = Christmas Bird Count; “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; “WP” = Western Panhandle of Florida (*Bay*, *Escambia*, *Gulf*, *Okaloosa*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Walton* counties); “WTF” = Woerner Turf Farm.

RED-THROATED LOON – Casual in the WP, singles were found on Choctawhatchee Bay, *Okaloosa* 15 December (Jean Williams, Susan Tiesciero); Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* 25 January (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan); and at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 29 January (Bob Wallace, Debbie Wallace). Rare but regular in winter at Guntersville, *Marshall*, an immature was found there 11 February (Dick Reynolds, Linda Reynolds).

PACIFIC LOON – Now rare but regular on the Gulf Coast, three singles were noted in the WP on Choctawhatchee Bay, *Okaloosa* 15 December (Jean Williams, Susan Tiesciero), and at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 7-11 January (Alan Knothe, Lyn Atherton, Jill Gaetzi *et al.*; ph.) and 29 January (Bob Wallace, Debbie Wallace). Reports of four singles were received from Alabama: upper Perdido Bay, *Baldwin* 28 December (Bob Duncan, Jim Dickerson) (rare but regular); Mallard Creek Recreation Area, *Lawrence*

30 December (Steve McConnell; ph.) (rare); Perdido Key area, *Baldwin* 3 January (Bob Reid) and 10 January (Greg Jackson) (rare but regular); and Guntersville, *Marshall* 6 February (Bailey McKay) and 13-15 February (Dick Reynolds, Linda Reynolds, m.ob.) (rare but regular).

COMMON LOON – An unusually large flock of 520+ was found at Perdido Key, *Baldwin* 10 January (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson).

HORNED GREBE – At Brown's Creek on Lake Guntersville, *Marshall*, David George counted 235 on 1 February, a good number for one spot in inland Alabama.

RED-NECKED GREBE – A single adult, seen from 20 December through the end of February at Spring Creek on Lake Guntersville, *Marshall*, established the 14th record for Alabama (Dick Reynolds, Steve McConnell, m.ob.; ph.; @ABRC).

EARED GREBE – Rare in the WP, two were at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 2 December – 22 January (present since October) (Jean Williams, Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown, Terry Neumyer, m.ob.). At Town Creek Marsh, *Colbert*, Steve McConnell found a single 30 December (ph.), and at Guntersville, *Marshall*, Bailey McKay recorded another single 6 February (rare inland).

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN – Rare for the Mountain Region, 50 were found on Weiss Lake, *Cherokee* 2 December (Linda Baker, Winston Baker). Good numbers were at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone* 22 December (53, Wheeler NWR CBC) and 29 December (71, Steve McConnell) where the species is rare but regular. At Town Creek Marsh, *Colbert* Ned Piper counted 35 on 25 February and 27 on 27 February (locally rare).

LITTLE BLUE HERON – A single was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 13-15 December (Bob Duncan *et al.*) (rare in winter in the WP).

CATTLE EGRET – Rare in winter in the WP, 15-80 birds visited the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 2-15 December (Jean Williams, Bob Duncan *et al.*). Cattle Egret is erratic in winter on the Alabama Gulf Coast, so 15 was a noteworthy number in *Baldwin* 28 January (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow).

GREEN HERON – Rare in north Alabama in winter, two reports were received: one at Smith Lake, *Cullman*, on the Cullman CBC 21 December (Vince Meleski), and another single at Blountsville, *Blount* 11 February (Harriett Wright, Edith Hunt). Five was a good total on the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin* 3 January.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE – Locally rare in Alabama except at Wheeler NWR, where it is regular, several reports were received for this species: three at Montgomery, *Montgomery* 17 December (Larry Gardella);

two at Russellville, *Franklin* 15 January (Damien Simbeck); 80 at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone* 17 January (Larry Gardella) (maximum for inland Alabama and maximum for winter in Alabama); three at Magnolia Springs, *Baldwin* 27 January (Alan Knothe *et al.*); a single at Linden, *Marengo* 21 February (Don Self, Judy Self); and five near Florence, *Lauderdale* 22 February (Jud Johnston, Jared Caudle, Ned Piper).

ROSS'S GOOSE – Accidental in the WP, one was found with a flock of Snow Geese at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 2 December (Jean Williams, Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown, Terry Neumyer; ph.), and another single was at Niceville, *Okaloosa* 15 December (Bob McKenney, Jan Fabozzi). Locally rare in Alabama except at Wheeler NWR, where it is regular, several reports were received for this species: a single at Waterloo, *Lauderdale* 9 December (Damien Simbeck); 16 on the Wheeler NWR CBC, *Limestone* 20 December (maximum for Alabama); one at Russellville, *Franklin* 15 January (Damien Simbeck); two at Guntersville, *Marshall* 18 February (Dick Reynolds, Harriett Wright, Edith Hunt); and three at the WTF, *Lowndes* 29 February (Larry Gardella).

BLUE-WINGED TEAL – Five at Guin, *Marion* 23 February (Jud Johnston) set an early arrival date for the Mountain Region.

HARLEQUIN DUCK – An immature male found on the east end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile* 8 February (Geoff Hill *et al.*) established the fifth Alabama and second Gulf Coast record (ph. Mark Liu; @ABRC).

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER – One was spotted on Little Bear Creek Reservoir, *Franklin* 15 January (Damien Simbeck) (rare in inland Alabama).

BLACK SCOTER – Five individuals of this rare and erratic species were found at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* 31 January (Steve McConnell) and 10 February (Eric Soehren).

LONG-TAILED DUCK – One was tallied on the Dauphin Island CBC, *Mobile* 20 December (rare and erratic at this locale). Rare but regular at Lake Guntersville, *Marshall*, up to seven were found 11 January through the end of February (Bill McAllister, Linda Reynolds, m.ob.). Rare for the Inland Coastal Plain, a single was found at the Montgomery Zoo, *Montgomery* 31 January (Larry Gardella) and 1 March (Lynne Williams).

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE – Early arrival for Alabama was marked by singles 24 February at both Magnolia Springs, *Baldwin* (Darrin LeBlanc) and Dauphin Island, *Mobile* (Paul Milotis). Also early was one at Gulf Shores SP, *Baldwin* 26 February (Ron Garmon).

NORTHERN HARRIER – Twenty+ was a good number for one site, Key

Cave NWR, *Lauderdale* 5 February (Dwight Cooley).

GOLDEN EAGLE – Rare in Alabama, one was found on Dugger Mountain, Talladega NF, *Cleburne* 6 February (Ryan Shurette *et al.*).

MERLIN – Rare in north Alabama in winter, two were recorded on the Wheeler NWR CBC, *Limestone* 20 December, and a single was spotted along County Road 9 in *DeKalb* 27 February (Barbara Stedman).

PRAIRIE FALCON – One below Guntersville Dam, *Marshall* 19 February (Dick Reynolds, Linda Reynolds) established the fourth record for Alabama (@ABRC).

SANDHILL CRANE – Casual in the WP, three were at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 26 February (Don Ware, Brian Monk). A large flock spent the winter at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone* with counts of 257 on 8 December (Jimmy Wells, m.ob.) and 407 on the Wheeler NWR CBC 20 December, the latter a new record count for Alabama.

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER – A single at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 27 February (Alan Knothe, Jean Williams; ph.) set the first February record for the WP.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER – Rare in winter for inland Alabama, one bird was along the Coosa River below Jordan Dam, *Elmore* 16-17 December (Jeff Garner).

POMARINE JAEGER – An adult seen from the Dauphin Island-Fort Morgan ferry, *Baldwin* 8 February (Greg Jackson) was rare, especially near shore.

LITTLE GULL – One observed at the Mallard Creek Recreation Area, *Lawrence* 28-30 December (Jeff Wilson *et al.*) established the eighth Alabama record (ph.; @ABRC).

BONAPARTE'S GULL – A good number for the Inland Coastal Plain (200+) was recorded at Speigner, *Elmore* 9 December (Helen Kittinger *et al.*).

CALIFORNIA GULL – A first-year bird was noted at Summerdale, *Baldwin* 12 January (Greg Jackson) to set the fifth record for Alabama (@ABRC).

THAYER'S/ICELAND GULL – A single, probably Thayer's Gull, was at Wilson Dam, *Lauderdale/Colbert* 9 February (Damien Simbeck; @ABRC). There are three prior Thayer's Gull records for Alabama.

ICELAND GULL – An immature at Foley, *Baldwin* 25 January (Bill Summerour, Ann Miller) established the third record for Alabama (@ABRC).

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL – A third-winter bird at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* 20 December (Bill Bremser *et al.*) was rare for the WP. Up to six (a new maximum for Alabama) were counted at different sites (Foley, Summerdale, Magnolia Springs) in *Baldwin* 2-30 January (Steve McConnell,

Greg Jackson, Bill Summerour *et al.*) (rare but increasing).

GLAUCOUS GULL – Singles, probably the same individual, were noted at Wheeler Dam, *Lauderdale/Lawrence* 28 December (Jeff Wilson) and at Wilson Dam, *Lauderdale/Colbert* 9 February (Damien Simbeck) where the species is rare (ph.). Also rare at Guntersville, *Marshall*, a first-year bird was found 19 January through the end of February (Judy Newsome, Daniel Jacobson, John Henderson *et al.*).

GLAUCOUS X HERRING (“NELSON’S”) GULL – The first definite record for this form for Alabama was set by a first-year bird seen at Foley and Summerdale, *Baldwin* 25 January – 7 February (Bill Summerour, Steve McConnell *et al.*) (ph.).

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL – A first-year bird was found at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 4 January (Jim Haw, Sandy Haw) (rare on Gulf Coast).

CASPIAN TERN – One was on Okaloosa Island, *Okaloosa* 15 December (Bill Bremser) to set the second December record for the WP.

SANDWICH TERN – Two were at Destin, *Okaloosa* 15 December (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Cecil Brown, Bill Bremser).

FORSTER’S TERN – One at Guin, *Marion* 23 February (Jud Johnston) was rare in winter for the Mountain Region.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE – A new maximum for Alabama was established with the count of 403 on the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin* 3 January.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE – At Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 6-22 birds were present 6 December – 30 January (Bob Duncan). A maximum for Alabama was established 3 January on the Gulf Shores CBC (Foley area), *Baldwin*, with a tally of 160 (Howard Horne *et al.*).

SHORT-EARED OWL – Dwight Cooley found two at Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale* 5 February where the species is rare but regular.

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL – A single was heard at Little River Canyon National Park, *Cherokee* 30 December (Barbara Stedman; @ABRC) to set the seventh record for Alabama.

COMMON NIGHTHAWK – A single in Birmingham, *Jefferson* 1 December (Greg Harber) was late.

BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD – The third and fourth records for Alabama were set by the following singles (both b., ph., @ABRC): adult female at Frisco City, *Monroe* 20 December (Fred Bassett, Susie Byrd), and an adult male, present since late summer, in Mobile, *Mobile* 6 January (Fred Bassett, Carl Wolcott).

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD – An adult male at Fairhope, *Baldwin*,

present since November, was banded 4 December (Fred Bassett, David Dortch; ph.; @ABRC) and established the 15th record for Alabama. Another adult male at East Brewton, *Escambia* 31 December established the 16th record for Alabama (Fred Bassett, Pat McArthur; b.; ph.; @ABRC)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD – One present for the winter season in east Birmingham, *Jefferson* (Bob Sargent) was rare in winter, especially for north Alabama.

CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD – Casual in the WP, one was banded in Niceville, *Okaloosa* 11 February (Fred Bassett, Beth McDonald). The 20th-23rd records for Alabama, all single immature males, b., ph. and @ABRC, were established by the following birds: Birmingham, *Jefferson* 31 October (and present through 4 February) (Bob Sargent *et al.*); Mobile, *Mobile* 11 December (Fred Bassett, Glenda Huff); Mobile, *Mobile* 17 December (Fred Bassett, Laurie Bailey); and Heatherwood, *Shelby* 6 January (and lingering until 28 March) (Bob Sargent, Margaret Jameson).

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD – An adult male at Pensacola, *Escambia*, was banded 30 December and lingered until 30 January (b. Fred Bassett, ph. David Dortch and Lyn Atherton; m.ob.).

ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD – Accidental in Florida, the fourth WP record of this species came from Pensacola, *Escambia* 1-16 February where one was banded (Fred Bassett, Glenda Bowman). The 18th record for Alabama was marked by an immature male at Fairhope, *Baldwin* 31 January (Fred Bassett, David Dortch; b.; ph.; @ABRC).

VERMILION FLYCATCHER – Casual in the WP, an adult male was noted at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 16 December (Lenny Fenimore *et al.*). Rare in Alabama, an adult male was observed at Foley (Glen Lakes), *Baldwin* 28 December – 4 February (Carolyn Henning, Eva Barnett, m.ob.; ph.). An immature male was recorded on the Gulf Shores CBC (west of Foley), *Baldwin* 3 January (Bill Summerour, m.ob.) and lingered through 4 February.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER – Still casual in the WP, but now almost regular, a single was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 15 December (Don Ware).

WESTERN KINGBIRD – Casual in winter in the WP, singles were noted 2-23 January at Pensacola, *Escambia* (Morris Clark) and 6 January at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* (Bob Duncan).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER – The second January record for the WP was set by a single at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 3-15 January (Alan Knothe *et al.*). Rare in winter in Alabama, Stan and Dana Hamilton had one immature and one adult on 2 January and one adult on 3 January in the Gulf Shores

CBC area, *Baldwin*.

WHITE-EYED VIREO – Two were found at Lake Land Farms, *Marion* 20 January (Helen Kittinger, Lela Anne Brewer) (rare in winter on the Inland Coastal Plain).

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO – One at Niceville, *Okaloosa* 15 December (Jean Williams) set the third winter record for the WP.

BARN SWALLOW – A single at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 16 February (Brian Monk) marked the first February record for the WP.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH – At Montgomery, *Montgomery*, two found 3 January (Larry Gardella, Andrea Menyhert) were rare for the Inland Coastal Plain.

SEDGE WREN – Rare in winter in the Tennessee Valley, a single was noted during the Wheeler NWR CBC, *Limestone/Morgan* 20 December.

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER – This species is rare in winter for inland Alabama, so the following singles were notable: Wheeler NWR CBC, *Limestone/Morgan* 20 December, and Hope Hull, *Montgomery* 30 December (Larry Gardella).

GRAY CATBIRD – One was found on the Wheeler NWR CBC, *Limestone/Morgan* 20 December (rare in winter in north Alabama).

TENNESSEE WARBLER – One photographed at Pensacola, *Escambia* 6 January (Lyn Atherton) established the second winter record for the WP. The first mid- to late winter record for Alabama was set by a single at a feeder in Hollins, *Clay*, during February (Mary Wilson; b. 14 February; ph.).

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER – This species is rare in winter in the Tennessee Valley, so the following records were noteworthy: a single was found on the Wheeler NWR CBC, *Limestone/Morgan* 20 December, and one was at Guntersville, *Marshall* 1 January (Damien Simbeck).

NASHVILLE WARBLER – A single found on Ono Island, *Baldwin* 3 January during the Gulf Shores CBC (Bob Reid *et al.*) marked the fourth winter record for Alabama.

YELLOW WARBLER – One at Valparaiso, *Okaloosa* 15 December (Carole Goodyear, Phil Goodyear) and another at Pensacola, *Escambia* 20 December (Cecil brown) established the second and third December records for the WP, respectively. Another single at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 24 January (Brian Monk *et al.*) marked the first January record for the WP.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER – An adult male found at Pensacola, *Escambia* 6 December (Morris Clark) provided the second December record for the WP.

- PRAIRIE WARBLER** – One found 15 December at Niceville, *Okaloosa* (Jean Williams, Susan Tiesciero) and another at Pensacola, *Escambia* 20 December (Powers McLeod, Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown *et al.*) marked the fifth and sixth December records for the WP, respectively.
- PALM WARBLER** – Uncommon to rare in winter in the Tennessee Valley, two were spotted at Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale* 23 January (Damien Simbeck).
- WILSON'S WARBLER** – Casual in winter in the WP, an adult male was found at Pensacola, *Escambia* 20 December (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Powers McLeod, Cecil Brown *et al.*).
- YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT** – Very rare in winter in the WP, one was found 15 December at Niceville, *Okaloosa* (Jean Williams).
- SUMMER TANAGER** – A female was tallied on the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin* 3 January (Betsy Tetlow, Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Cecil Brown) (rare in winter in Alabama).
- CLAY-COLORED SPARROW** – One at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 4 December – 6 February (Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown, Terry Neumeyer, Lyn Atherton, Jill Gaetzi) set the second December and winter record for the WP.
- BREWER'S SPARROW** – One at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 26 December (Bob Duncan) and present since 24 September (Lucy Duncan) possibly established the first record for Florida (@FOSRC).
- LARK SPARROW** – Casual in winter in the WP, one was at Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 8 December – 22 January (Bob Duncan, m.ob.), and another was at Pensacola Beach, *Escambia* 20 December (Will Duncan, Joe John, Ann Forster, Dan Forster). One was noted on the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin* 3 January (Bill Summerour, Eric Soehren, Jennifer Soehren) (rare in winter in Alabama).
- SAVANNAH SPARROW** – An estimated 500 at Bishop, *Colbert* 6 February (Damien Simbeck) established a maximum count for the Tennessee Valley.
- GRASSHOPPER SPARROW** – This species is rare in north Alabama in winter, so a single at Bishop, *Colbert* 6 February (Damien Simbeck) was notable.
- LE CONTE'S SPARROW** – Four on the Wheeler NWR CBC, *Limestone/Morgan* 20 December was a good number for this locally rare species.
- LINCOLN'S SPARROW** – Two were found at Speigner, *Elmore* 1 February (Larry Gardella) (rare in winter on the Inland Coastal Plain).
- LAPLAND LONGSPUR** – Several were noted at the WTF, *Lowndes* 7 December (Larry Gardella) (rare but regular at this site), and six were recorded on the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin* 3 January (Stan Hamilton, Dana

Hamilton) (rare but becoming regular at this site).

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK – A male and a female visited the feeders of Jim Dickerson in Lillian, *Baldwin* 28 December. A feeder in Underwood, *Lauderdale*, hosted a female 11-15 February (Paul Kittle, Donna Kittle) (occasional in winter).

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK – A female was at a feeder in Pensacola, *Escambia* 20 December – 7 February (Bill Bremser, Lyn Atherton, m.ob.; ph.) (casual in winter for the WP).

INDIGO BUNTING – Rare, but becoming regular in winter in the WP, three reports were received: winter male, Fort Pickens, *Escambia* 6 December (Bill Bremser, Greta Bremser); male and immature, Pensacola, *Escambia* 20 December (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Cecil Brown *et al.*); and immature male, Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* 26 January (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan).

SHINY COWBIRD – Casual in winter in the WP, one male and one female were noted at Pensacola, *Escambia* 28 December (Morris Clark *et al.*).

BRONZED COWBIRD – The eighth record for the WP was established by a single seen at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* 30 January (Alan Knothe *et al.*). The seventh-ninth records for Alabama were established by the following three sightings: an adult male at Perdido Key, *Baldwin* 8 January+ (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson, m.ob.; ph.; @ABRC); two adult males at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* 10 January+ (Greg Jackson, m.ob.; ph.; @ABRC); and one adult male at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* 8 February (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson; ph.; @ABRC).

BALTIMORE ORIOLE – Rare in winter in Alabama, five reports, all of single birds, were received: male at feeder, Killen, *Lauderdale* 31 December (Shirley Wayland, Jim Wayland); immature female at feeder, Providence, *Marengo*, early January (Don Self, Judy Self); immature male, Montgomery, *Montgomery* 3 January (Larry Gardella); immature male at feeder, Florence, *Lauderdale* 5 and 28 January (Phyllis Nofzinger); and immature male, Muscle Shoals, *Colbert* 31 January (Damien Simbeck *et al.*).

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