

Christmas Bird Counts, Alabama, 1959 (continued)

SPECIES	A	B	D	M
Rufous-sided Towhee	25	275	165	29
Savannah Sparrow	25	101	5	210
Grasshopper Sparrow	—	1	—	—
Le Conte's Sparrow	—	2	—	—
Sharp-tailed Sparrow	—	—	34	3
Seaside Sparrow	—	—	12	2
Vesper Sparrow	—	11	—	34
Bachman's Sparrow	—	2	2	1
Slate-colored Junco	13	668	4	2
Chipping Sparrow	30	86	—	114
Field Sparrow	50	733	8	62
White-throated Sparrow	40	778	379	878
Fox Sparrow	2	34	—	—
Swamp Sparrow	9	181	122	3
Song Sparrow	6	195	4	6
Lapland Longspur	—	25	—	—
TOTAL SPECIES	68	89	117	134
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	111,658	14,566	8,253	13,835
TOTAL SPECIES, ALL FOUR COUNTS:—171				

OBSERVERS: Auburn—J. L. Dusi (compiler), R. T. Dusi, N. Steward, D. W. Speake, R. Speake, Birmingham—F. T. Carney, B. H. Chapman, Mrs. H. Copeland, E. Crutcher, F. B. Daniel, M. Ferris, E. L. Grimley, M. Harden, D. C. Holliman, T. A. Imhof (compiler), M. H. Perry, R. Perry, G. Snead, I. F. Snead, A. Walker, A. West, E. M. West, Dauphin Island—M. Caldwell, J. L. Dorn, M. W. Gaillard, E. R. Hartmann, D. C. Holliman, J. A. Imhof, T. A. Imhof (compiler), R. J. Newman, A. R. Tabor, Mobile—J. L. Dorn, S. J.

* Comments on the more unusual species recorded.—Reddish Egret: second winter record for Alabama (Dorn). Mottled Duck: 9th definite record for state (Dorn). Common Merganser: 3rd record for the Piedmont (Dusi), and 5th record for the Gulf Coast (Imhof), (one of the 5 latter records consists of a flock present from December to April 1959 on Dauphin Island). Spotted Sandpiper: 6th winter record for the state and the first one inland (Dusi). Knot: 2nd winter record for Alabama (Imhof). Pectoral Sandpiper: 2nd January record for Alabama (Tabor). Great Black-backed Gull: 2nd winter record for Alabama (Dorn). Chuck-will's-widow: 2nd winter record for Alabama, both on Dauphin Island (Holliman and Tabor). Whip-poor-will: now over 12 records in December, January, and February for the 2 coastal counties (Dorn and Gaillard). Rough-winged Swallow: 5th December or January record for Mobile County (Imhof and Imhof). Red-breasted Nuthatch: recorded in Alabama in 14 of the last 17 winters (since fall of 1943) and on the coast in 5 of the last 6 winters (since fall of 1954). Catbird: 4th winter record for Birmingham (Harden and Walker). Parula Warbler: 2nd winter record for Alabama, both males in live oaks in Bellingrath Gardens (Imhof). Yellow-breasted Chat: 3rd definite winter record for Alabama, 2nd for Mobile County (Dorn). Western Meadowlark: 1st record for the Birmingham area (Imhof and Crutcher), now definitely established as regular in winter in the Tennessee Valley, the Black Belt, and on the Gulf Coast. Grasshopper Sparrow: netting has helped to establish that species is regular in winter at Birmingham (Imhof). Le Conte's Sparrow: 4th winter recorded at Birmingham (Imhof). Lapland Longspur: 1st record for Birmingham Christmas Count, but established now as regular in winter south to the Black Belt.

—THOMAS A. IMHOF
307 38th Street
Fairfield, Alabama
—J. L. DORN
Spring Hill College
Mobile, Alabama
—JULIAN L. DUSI
Dept. Zool-Ent.
Auburn University
Auburn, Alabama

LATE NEWS FROM THE FIRE ANT FRONT

(Excerpts from a paper presented at the National Audubon Convention, Nov. 10, 1959)

A full year has passed since our report on "The Hazards of Broadcasting Toxic Pesticides", summarized the dangers from the unwise scattering of toxic chemicals for pest control. It documented how the imported fire ant "eradication" program in the southeastern states was ill-conceived, unnecessary, poorly handled and extremely destructive to wildlife. Nothing that we have learned during the past year has caused us to modify these statements. Unfortunately, the fire ant program is still being conducted, and one and a quarter million acres have now been deluged with heptachlor or dieldrin, by federal and state control agencies.

No one can foresee the total harm which may result from this careless use of strong chlorinated hydro-carbon insecticides. We now know the seriousness of the more immediate results, but the residue of the chemical will remain in the soil for three to six, or more, years! What will happen to the insect larvae, the worms, the reptiles and amphibians, the rodents, and other life in the soil which form important food-chains that are essential to the ecology of the Southeast?

It seems probable that irreparable harm may result to the economy of the affected states, from Florida and Georgia westward to eastern Texas, where the fire ant program is centered. When this chemical is broadcast over hundreds of thousands of acres, a very serious mortality factor is added to the many other adverse factors facing most wild and domestic forms of animal life. Many species may not be able to persist under this added burden. When part of the vital foodchain of life is broken or weakened, a whole complex of related forms must suffer.

This disturbs all thinking conservationists and impels them, and us, to demand that the unwise broadcasting of toxic chemicals for control of the imported fire ant (and many other pests) be stopped. We favor local treatments to known infestations of pests as contrasted to the broadcast application.

The public has been alerted on the damage done to wildlife, to livestock, and to other organisms by reports and published results of the studies of biologists and other investigators. As a consequence many farmers and cattlemen are loath to sign up their lands for treatment, and communities are protesting the program in their areas. They should continue to do so, and particularly in the light of a new regulation of the Food and Drug Administration announced on October 27, 1959. This reduces the spray-residue tolerance for heptachlor and heptachlor epoxide on 34 fruits and vegetables from 0.1 part per million to ZERO. Included in this list of 34 is alfalfa, clover, and grass! How, then, can USDA and state agencies continue broadcasting of heptachlor on pasture and crop lands? For granules containing heptachlor (at 10% strength) do lodge upon alfalfa, clover, and grass where they may be eaten by grazing animals. Residue cannot be washed off fruits and vegetables, so they should not be subjected to heptachlor. The USDA knew this when they distributed a sheet of precautions and directions to persons whose properties are to be treated. These sheets contain a number of precautions, among which is, "Leafy vegetables in your garden, such as lettuce, cabbage, turnips, etc., should be covered prior to application of insecticides and then washed before eating."

Since the residue in the soil may wash into streams, ponds and even into public water supplies, medical and public health authorities are increasingly disturbed at the hazard to people. For heptachlor accumulates in the bodies of people as it does in the bodies of wild or domestic animals, birds, and other organisms. There is mounting evidence that these chemicals cause an increased incidence of various kinds of cancer, of some heart disease, and mental disturbances.

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Why is not more money appropriated for research upon the effects of such chemicals to people, livestock, poultry, birds, and animals? Although ten to twelve millions of dollars now have been appropriated by state legislatures and the Congress for the fire ant program alone, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services receives only \$280,000 for research upon pesticides and wildlife this fiscal year!

The Food and Drug Administration needs more inspectors to examine milk, meat, fruit, and vegetables for heptachlor content in order to prevent shipments containing chemical residue, and thus to safeguard our children and ourselves. How can these foods be free of contamination when broadcasting of heptachlor continues so unnecessarily?

—The fire ant program has been found to be disastrous to many organisms—**WHY**

SHOULD IT BE CONTINUED?

—HAROLD S. PETERS
Research Biologist
National Audubon Society

"PASS THE BERRY"

One of the bird thrills of this season of the year is the hundreds of Cedar Waxwings which move in to clean up the berries. I recently observed two sitting on a limb. They were playing "pass the berry." The passage of the berry was so rapid the eye could not detect the passage, but would see the berry appear first in one beak then in the other. I watched for several minutes and the berry must have passed several hundred times without a single fumble.

—JENKINS JACKSON, Livingston, Alabama

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER PARASITIZED BY COWBIRD

On August 23, 1959, a female Prothonotary Warbler was observed feeding a young Brown-headed Cowbird along the bank of Mountain Fork Creek where it empties into Flint River fifteen miles northeast of Huntsville. The area is low, often flooded, and bears a very lush growth.

The Prothonotary is the only eastern warbler that nests in a tree cavity, yet the Brown-headed Cowbird parasitizes it. This is the first known for Alabama.

I remember Prothonotaries nesting in tin cans put up during the 1940's by Mrs. T. A. Wigginton of Nashville, Tennessee. Mrs. Wigginton had to remove regularly the eggs of persistent cowbirds. If the eggs were not removed, the warblers would sometimes build over them. Sometimes they desert the nest, but usually would rear the young cowbirds.

—MARGARET L. ROBINSON

Ed. note—Other Alabama cowbird victims include: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, White-eyed, Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, Blue-winged, Parula, and Hooded Warblers, American Redstart, Summer Tanager, and Indigo Bunting. We urge members to be on the lookout for additional hosts this spring and report them on these pages.

KRIDER'S RED-TAILED HAWK

This bird spent practically the entire winter of 1959 in the vicinity of my farm. I saw him on any number of occasions both flying and perched. On one occasion he was circling above me while two Crows dive-bombed him. I did not see a hit, but it had taken place as some of his large feathers were crushed and displaced. I have noticed in other instances that local birds seem to recognize a rare foreigner and resent his presence, and this itself becomes an aid in identification.

—JENKINS JACKSON, Livingston

REGIONAL WINGBEATS

DECATUR—Late fall and winter settled on the Valley and Yankee cold fronts moved in with clocklike regularity. Shallow backwaters iced over, and there were spittings of snow and sleet, but none that remained on the ground for more than a few hours, until the real storm of Feb. 13 & 14.

Wheeler Refuge continued to feel the continental water fowl shortage. In late December, Canada Geese reached a peak of 28,000, dropping about 10 per cent below normal numbers. Some 800 Blue Geese and 50 Snow Geese stayed for the winter. Ducks finally came to a peak of about 40,000 in early January, still a third below the count for the 1958-59 season. All diving ducks were scarce, but percentagewise, Black Ducks increased. On December 30, David Hulse and a hunting companion shot down a pair of Blue-winged Teal, both in full breeding plumage. Blue-wings aren't supposed to winter in the Tennessee Valley, but there are always a few ignorant ones who haven't read the books.

At least three partially albino Canada Geese used refuge fields. One freakish bird had the normal body coloration of a Canada, but a completely white head and neck, possibly a Blue Goose-Canada Goose hybrid.

Bonaparte's Gulls and Horned Grebes were seen throughout most of the period. On January 4, David Hulse spotted an adult Franklin's Gull, the second record for this locality, near the Decatur boat harbor.

The find of the period was a Golden Eagle, the first local record. One was sighted by David Hulse on December 19, another, possibly the same bird, by Paul Robinson, Henry Grammer, and Homer Blackwood on December 26. In both cases, observers had a close view of the bird and could detect the feathered shanks. We have suspected that some of the immature Bald Eagles seen locally each winter were really goldens, but these were the first solid records.

—THOMAS Z. ATKESON, P. O. Box 1643, Decatur, Alabama

HUNTSVILLE—The report from this area is rather commonplace, but this is usually true during the winter season. The territory covered in the reports from Huntsville usually includes Monte Sano and the country north and east, a sector with a 15-mile radius stretching from southwest of New Market to Gurley. Occasionally, observations are made from Gurley south to the Tennessee River, and once or twice during a season, the country to the west, from Huntsville to Decatur, is covered. An average of 8 hours each Saturday is spent in actual observation and approximately 100 miles of road distance is traveled.

Of the birds not seen in other seasons, the following have been sighted this winter: Marsh Hawk—common, Pigeon Hawk—1 sighted—Redstone Arsenal, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker—common, Brown Creeper—occasional, Winter Wren—uncommon, Hermit Thrush—occasional, Ruby-crowned Kinglet—common, Golden-crowned Kinglet—common, Water Pipit—1 flock at Wheeler Refuge, Cedar Waxwing—occasional flocks, Myrtle Warbler—common, Rusty Blackbird—common, Purple Finch—common, Pine Siskin—rare, Savannah Sparrow—common, Vesper Sparrow—uncommon, Slate-colored Junco—common, White-crowned Sparrow—occasional (fewer than last year), White-throated Sparrow—common, Fox Sparrow—occasional, Lincoln's Sparrow—1 sighted 10 miles north of Huntsville, Swamp Sparrow—common, Song Sparrow—common, Lapland Longspur—3 in flock with Horned Larks at Wheeler Refuge.

—JIM and MARGARET ROBINSON, 1701 Oakwood Ave., N. E., Huntsville, Ala.

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