

REGIONAL WINGBEATS

TENNESSEE VALLEY-DECATUR—From late August to the present, the weather can best be described with one word—"wet." Rains have fallen at least weekly, frequently more often. The fall shorebird migration was above average, with numbers of Sandpipers and Yellowlegs moving through. David Hulse spotted a half dozen Avocets near Old Beaver Lake on September 29, and Henry Grammer saw three the same date about a mile away, possibly the same birds.

Local Dove numbers were slightly above those of last fall, and no Trichomoniasis was reported. In mid-October, a hunter bagged an odd dove near Belle Mina. In size and conformation it appeared to be a Mourning Dove, but its plumage, instead of gray, was a pale, reddish brown. David Hulse saw the bird, brought it to the Wheeler Refuge office and employees there shipped it to Dr. Maurice Baker at the Wildlife Research Unit, Auburn. Dr. Baker identified it as the rare red phase of the Mourning Dove, an example of the erythristism that occasionally affects most species of higher animals.

The fall flight of Blue-winged Teal was well above last year's. David found American Widgeon earlier than ever before, spotting a small flock on September 21. By mid-November, Wheeler Refuge duck numbers had built up to the 15,000 mark; not high, but somewhat above those of this time last fall.

During the last few days of September, geese arrived with a rush. By mid-October, over 15,000 were present. By late October, the refuge held an all-time record peak of 38,500, although 5,000 of these had drifted away to parts unknown by mid-November.

As usual, Canada Geese made up the majority, but there was also an increase in both Blue Geese and Snow Geese. Twelve hundred Blues and 80 Snows are currently using the refuge. With above-average crop yields, Wheeler hopes to attract and hold record numbers of waterfowl this fall and winter.

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HUNTSVILLE—Migration was under way here after the first week in August. We found that the birds we were seeing every day in the yards were not our resident population when we set up our mist nets and started banding. Some firsts this fall were: 8/23, Palm Warbler, Canada Warbler; 9/4, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler; 9/5, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Traill's Flycatcher, Tennessee Warbler; 9/8, Blue-winged Warbler; 9/12, Least Flycatcher, Swainson's Thrush, Gray-cheeked Thrush; 9/22, Black-poll'd Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Marsh Hawk (see article on hawk migration); 9/28, Mourning Warbler (no specimen for Alabama, but authors did not collect this Immature female); 9/30, Nashville Warbler, also heard first geese that night; 10/1, 42 Canada Geese; 10/2, Ruby-crowned Kinglet; 10/5, Philadelphia Vireo, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; 10/8, Lincoln's Sparrow; 10/10, Swamp Sparrow; 10/11, White-throated Sparrow, Slate-colored Junco, Orange-crowned Warbler; 10/12, Hermit Thrush.

Red-eyed Vireos sang constantly until August 23. Several were seen after that, but no songs were heard. One White-eyed Vireo really gave us a hard time. It sang for several days before we ever found out for sure just what it was. It sounded like a Red-eyed, a Warbling Vireo, and a Summer Tanager. On only about three occasions in four days did it ever give the typical White-eyed song.

Yellow-billed Cuckoos mated as late as August 23. This species was last seen on October 2. The last Chuck-will's-widow was heard August 8, and the last Whip-poor-will, October 8.

The most numerous migrants were Swainson's Thrushes, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Magnolia Warblers, Tennessee Warblers, and Chestnut-sided Warblers, E. Wood Pewees, Catbirds, and Indigo Buntings. The song of the Gray-cheeked Thrush was heard September 20-22. Cold fronts passed through on September 12 and 18, producing noticeable waves of birds.

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BIRMINGHAM—September, October, and November temperatures were about normal but the rainfall for the year still lagged, 10.17 inches below normal. The first freeze occurred November 7. Weather conditions in general were pleasant and conducive to a prolonged colorful autumn, if not to an eventful fall migration.

In spite of the numerous fishermen, Lake Purdy's exposed mudflats, recurring each fall, continued to provide fair shore bird observations. Little Blue Herons were common until mid-September. Snowy Egrets were seen through September 20. Pectoral Sandpipers were observed throughout September, 15 sighted on September 15. One Sanderling was observed August 20. Spotted, Solitary, and Least Sandpipers were not uncommon with 2 Least Sandpipers and a Greater Yellowlegs still there on November 3. On August 29 and September 15, Black Terns were observed. One Least Tern, 35 Blue-winged Teal and 4 Baldpates were well out of the fisherman's way on October 3. Tom Imhof and Rose Mary Gaymer reported 1 Red-breasted Merganser on October 28, along with Green-winged Teal and Pintail Ducks at Purdy.

On October 7, Tom Imhof, Idalene Snead and Emmie Brownlie saw 3 Golden Plovers at Roberts' Field. Of note, a Common Snipe banded by Tom Imhof, April 17, 1960, at Roberts' Field was retrapped on November 20 at Roberts' Field.

Warbler migration proved to be poor. The writer observed no concentrations or groups, and the arrival dates were not significant except in one case. On August 17, Pat Riley had a Canada Warbler in company with a Worm-eating Warbler at her bird bath.

A female Summer Tanager was observed by Pat Riley on October 30 at the feeder.

White-throated Sparrows returned on October 11, a Fox Sparrow on November 7. Purple Finches appeared November 11; last year they returned November 17; in 1958, on November 2. Looks as though we will have another Purple Finch winter.

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TUSCALOOSA—The Tuscaloosa section is a new locality to be covered in ALABAMA BIRDLIFE, and will be encompassed in part by future Christmas Bird Counts. It is not atypical for the southwestern tier of counties, and, in general, is characterized by gentle rolling hills permeated by creeks and swamp lands bordering cultivated fields and dairy farms. It includes varied habitat types ranging from old fields, pure pine stands, mixed hardwood stands to extensive tracts of swamps associated with the Warrior River. South of Moundville the northern ramifications of the Black Belt are encountered with its prairie types and related elements. The University of Alabama Arboretum provides cultivated shrubs in the form of a bird sanctuary which is transversed by one mile of well-kept nature trails, and Moundville State Park offers good birding the year around with its protected grounds.

Fall pushed the usual migrants through this section with little commotion. A continual check at the local radio and TV towers revealed a low mortality rate of the common resident birds. The White-throated Sparrow was recorded October 12, but did not make himself known until eight days later. Flights of Canada Geese have been spotted with the earliest date being October 22. At least one flight of Blue Geese, with a few Snow Geese mixed in, was seen. Doves have been very abundant so far, with their numbers increasing around local feeders. The conspicuous presence of many immature doves is probably the product of an early fall extension of the breeding season. Myriads of black birds have been piling up in the open fields south of Moundville in ever-increasing numbers. However, periodic checks of dairy farm yards have not yet turned up a flock of Brewer's Blackbirds, which were seen last year; nor have I been able to make an Eastern Meadow Lark's call into a Western's yet. Wood Ducks are common in the cypress recesses and backwaters, and their incessant talk is pleasant to the ear late of an evening as one stops to listen along a swamp road.

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