

## THE 1968 ALABAMA CHRISTMAS COUNTS

Compiler and Editor—Robert R. Reid, Jr.

Undoubtedly the most significant feature of Alabama birdlife during the winter of 1968-69 was the large invasion of Evening Grosbeaks—see the winter season report in this issue. These birds had not been reported in Alabama prior to 1956 (Imhof, Thomas A., Alabama Birds (1962) : 532-33), but since then they have appeared in large numbers every three or four years. This winter record numbers were reported on the Birmingham and Auburn counts and a flock of 30 within the count period at Tuscaloosa. A group of Pine Siskins, which are regarded as a rare winter visitor on the Gulf Coast (op. cit.: 537-38), was reported on the Dauphin Island count; and a small flock at Wheeler Refuge was only the second refuge record (vide Thomas Z. Atkeson, Jr.). Red-breasted Nuthatches, which often precede or accompany an influx of northern finches, were seen on five of the seven Alabama counts. There also appears to have been an invasion of Fox Sparrows with a record high count of 137 in Birmingham (previous high 50), a relatively large number in Tuscaloosa and individuals as far south as Mobile and Dauphin Island. The Bewick's Wren on the Spring Hill College Campus was another report of a species that is rare to uncommon as far south as our Gulf Coast (op. cit.: 388).

Other significant winter visitors were a dark-phased Roughlegged Hawk at Birmingham (its first count record and only the second observation of a dark-phased bird for the state), a White-winged Dove at Bon Secour (a western visitor occasionally seen on our Gulf Coast in the fall or winter), the flock of Sandhill Cranes also at Bon Secour, a Long-billed Marsh Wren at Wheeler Refuge (where not usual in winter that far inland (op. cit.: 391), and a Gray-cheeked Thrush also at Birmingham (sixth winter record for the state).

The Dickcissel at a feeder in Mobile was the second consecutive count record for that seedeater and is probably the most significant observation of a summer resident on the counts. Other summer residents that uncommonly winter on the coast were a Cattle Egret in front of the marina on Dauphin Island, White-eyed Vireos on the Bon Secour and Dauphin Island counts, and two Yellow-throated Warblers at Bon Secour. A Baltimore Oriole at a feeder in Birmingham (its second count record) was also noteworthy.

At Mobile, the count record of 40 Avocets off the Cochran Causeway was the fifth report in the last six years and the Eared Grebe at the Chickasaw sewage treatment pond the third in the last four years on that count. High numbers were recorded at Mobile for the Canvasback (1200), Dunlin (518), Black Skimmer (250) and Ruddy Duck (175). The approximately 4500 Widgeons set a count record at Wheeler Refuge, and Coots numbering in the thousands were recorded in bay areas such as Mobile and Bon Secour. On the other hand, low water levels at Birmingham produced near-record low counts for Pied-billed Grebes, Canvasbacks, Lesser Scaup and Coots.

The Wheeler Refuge count included a male of the Iranian race of the Ring-necked Pheasant. That race was introduced at the refuge in 1962, and while other races have failed in Alabama due, it is believed, to our warmer climate, that race has bred on the refuge in the wild. Atkeson reports that while there are sightings of nests and broods each year, thus indicating the pheasants are definitely reproducing, they do not seem to be increasing. Another noteworthy Wheeler observation was the Ground Dove. Atkeson

reported it appeared to have disappeared from the Tennessee Valley over the eight-year period ending in 1963 (Alabama Birdlife (1964), 12 (2):24) but adds there have been a few records in each of the last three years.

Imhof has reported that Wood Ducks appear to be increasing in number in Alabama (Audubon Field Notes (1968), 22(5):615), and the high figure of 61 recorded at Friday Lake on the Tuscaloosa count would add supporting evidence. At Birmingham, the highest count record for Cardinals and White-throated Sparrows and the second highest for Towhees indicates those species are doing well, while the Eastern Bluebird appears to be faring poorly—at least in the count areas—since it was recorded in the lowest number ever at Birmingham and in low numbers elsewhere.

In 1968, Alabama's Christmas counts covered all of the major ecological regions of the state—Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (WR) in the Tennessee Valley, Birmingham (Bhm) in the Mountain Region, Auburn (Aub) in the Piedmont, Tuscaloosa (Tus) in the Coastal Plain, and Bon Secour (BS), Mobile (Mob) and Dauphin Island-Bellingrath Gardens (DI) on the Gulf Coast. Birds seen on the counts were as follows, those indicated by the symbol \* being seen during the count period (Dec. 20 through Jan. 1) but not on the count date and those indicated by the symbol x being species for which the exact number of individual birds was not available.

Comments by the compilers in addition to those included above, details respecting the counts (all taken in circles of 15-mile diameter) and participants (names of party leaders underscored where reported) were as follows:

Wheeler Refuge: Dec. 21, 7:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Overcast all day with drizzle increasing to steady downpour by 3:00PM; 38 degrees to 45 degrees; winds SW, 8-12 mph. 12 observers in 4 parties; 32 party-hours (25 by car, 7 on foot); 181 party-miles (174 by car, 7 on foot). Count centered at refuge headquarters on Flint Creek Island and including north shore of Tennessee River from White Springs Dike to Blackwell Slough; sloughs managed for waterfowl 60%; lakes, rivers and ponds 12%; woodland borders 10%; plowed fields and pastures 10%; bottomland hardwoods 8%. Greater Scaup within count period was a shot specimen. Participants: Thomas Z. Atkeson, Jr. (refuge manager), Andrew K. Bates, Michael Lee Bierly (compiler), J. H. Blackwood, Henry H. Grammer, John M. Imhof, Thomas A. Imhof, Helen H. Kittinger, Richard J. Kittinger, Robert R. Reid, Jr. (reporter for 1968 Alabama Christmas counts), and Thomas P. Sandlin.

Birmingham: Dec. 28, 5:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. Solid overcast to clear; 38 degrees to 55 degrees; winds westerly 10-25 mph; water levels extremely low. 37 observers in 10 parties; 92½ party-hours (20 by car, 72½ on foot); 469 party miles (418 by car, 51 on foot). Count centered at Shades Mtn. Filter Plant and including Roberts Field, East Lake, Lake Purdy and Oak Mtn.; oak-pine woods 26%; lakes, rivers and ponds 25%; residential 21%; woodland borders 10%; pastures, airports and golf courses 10%; tall grass 5%; bottomland hardwoods 3%. Participants: Gertrude Bachmann, Naomi G. Banks, Andrew K. Bates, Raymond D. Bates, Ruth Carmichael, Dale J. Carruthers, Jack N. Carusos, Kevin Carusos, Walter F. Coxe, Michael and Thomas Creel, Blanche E. Dean, Louise Foster, Corinne Glaze, Ed Greene, Dan C. Holliman, Ruth Horsley, John M. Imhof, Thomas A. Imhof (compiler), Helen H. Kittinger, Richard J. and Ronald D. Kittinger, George F. Maynard, Ann Miller, Bob Mills, Morton H. Perry, Margarette K. Persons, Millard F. Prather, James W. Shepherd, Dennis and Jane Shipley, Mary Alice Skelton, Bernice and D. H. Smalley, Idalene F. Snead, Ginny Toole, and Harriett H. Wright.

	WR	Bhm	Aub	Tus	BS	Mob	DI
<u>Loons</u>							
Com. Loon					13	1	x
<u>Grebes</u>							
Horned Grebe	2				15	4	x
Eared Grebe						1	
Pied-billed Grebe	3	8	1		18	3	x
<u>Pelicans and Allies</u>						5	
White Pelican					1		
Brown Pelican					1		
Gannet							
Double-crested Cormorant					15	1	x
<u>Wading Birds</u>							
Great Blue Heron	4	1	4		15	8	x
4 Little Blue Heron						*	1
Cattle Egret							x
Com. (or Am.) Egret					1	9	x
Snowy Egret						5	x
Louisiana Heron						1	x
<u>Ducks and Geese</u>							
Canada Goose	38,380						
Snow Goose	50					1	
Blue Goose	500					11	
Mallard	13,095	8		1		2	x
Black Duck	1,183					*	
Gadwall	27	2				300	
Pintail	3,997					43	
Green-winged Teal	67					18	x
Blue-winged Teal						5	x
Am. Widgeon (or Baldpate)	4,515					30	

Shoveler	30					341	
Wood Duck	3			61		10	x
Redhead						1	
Ring-necked Duck	2	223				214	
Canvasback		23			20	1,200	x
Greater Scaup	*					*	x
Lesser Scaup		9			20	25	x
Com. Goldeneye						1	x
Bufflehead	3				12	5	
Ruddy Duck	2	9			14	175	
Hooded Merganser	160				2	3	x
Com. (or Am.) Merganser	1						
Red-breasted Merganser					130	4	x
<u>Hawks</u>							
Turkey Vulture		1	*			3	x
Black Vulture			3			*	
Sharp-shinned Hawk		*			*	1	
Cooper's Hawk		2				1	
Red-tailed Hawk	9	11	*	6	2	4	x
Red-shouldered Hawk		7			2	*	
Rough-legged Hawk		1					
Marsh Hawk	3	3	1		3	1	x
Sparrow Hawk (or Kestrel)	7	11	*		26	11	x
<u>Quail and Allies</u>							
Bob-white	46	90	13	22	12	15	x
Ring-necked Pheasant (Iranian race)	1						
Wild Turkey							2
<u>Cranes, Rails and Allies</u>							
Sandhill Crane					15(a)		
King Rail						1	x

	WR	Bhm	Aub	Tus	BS	Mob	DI
Clapper Rail						5	x
Virginia Rail						*	
Sora						3	x
Com (or Florida) Gallinule						6	
Am. Coot	20	160		1	5,000	6,748	x
<u>Shorebirds</u>							
Am. Oystercatcher							x
Semipalmated Plover						4	x
Piping Plover						*	
Killdeer	51	164	11	12	200	73	x
Black-bellied Plover					1	32	x
Ruddy Turnstone							x
Am. Woodcock		7			*	3	x
Com. Snipe	15	40	6	1	8	12	x
Spotted Sandpiper						1	1
Willet						2	x
Greater Yellowlegs	1					12	x
Lesser Yellowlegs						6	
Least Sandpiper		1(b)				5	
Dunlin (or Red-backed Sandpiper)						518	
Short-billed Dowitcher						12	x
Semipalmated Sandpiper						22	x
Western Sandpiper						3	
Sanderling					2	42	x
Am. Avocet						40	
<u>Gulls and Terns</u>							
Herring Gull	166			1	46	163	x
Ring-billed Gull	354				165	259	x
Laughing Gull					1	184	x
Bonapartè's Gull					32	10	x

Forster's Tern					45	25	x
Com. Tern					4	2	
Royal Tern						5	x
Caspian Tern						1	x
Black Skimmer						250	x
<u>Doves</u>							
White-winged Dove					1		
Mourning Dove	1,070	782	10	45	22	375	x
Ground Dove	1				6	1	
<u>Owls</u>							
Barn Owl		1				5	
Screech Owl		*			*	2	x
Barred Owl		2	*	*		1	
<u>Kingfishers</u>							
Belted Kingfisher	1	24	4	1	18	14	x
<u>Woodpeckers</u>							
Yellow-shafted Flicker	18	126	7	25	14	82	x
Pileated Woodpecker	6	16	2	1	*	1	x
Red-bellied Woodpecker	12	63	10	11	16	12	x
Red-headed Woodpecker	1	13	*		3	4	x
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	7	12	3	3	7	4	x
Hairy Woodpecker		9	*	11		2	x
Downy Woodpecker	20	70	5	8	4	4	x
Red-cockaded Woodpecker		5			1		
<u>Flycatchers</u>							
Eastern Phoebe		8	3		5	4	x
<u>Larks</u>							
Horned Lark	5	10					
<u>Swallows</u>							
Tree Swallow						31	x
<u>Jays and Crows</u>							
Blue Jay	60	293	64	63	47	91	x

	WR	Bhm	Aub	Tus	BS	Mob	DI
Com. Crow	17,157	370	17	14	1	69	x
Fish Crow					65	14	x
<u>Titmice</u>							
Carolina Chickadee	70	257	40	38	4	6	x
Tufted Titmouse	43	305	61	6	6	26	x
<u>Nuthatches</u>							
White-breasted Nuthatch	4	60	*				x
Red-breasted Nuthatch	2	17	16		5		x
Brown-headed Nuthatch		72	25		21	43	x
<u>Creepers</u>							
Brown Creeper	4	12	1			*	
<u>Wrens</u>							
House Wren		1			8	3	x
Winter Wren	3	14	1				
Bewick's Wren		2				1	
Carolina Wren	29	105	32	21	24	24	x
Long-billed Marsh Wren	1					1	x
Short-billed Marsh (or Sedge) Wren		*			1		x
<u>Thrashers</u>							
Mockingbird	32	211	33	40	100	101	x
Catbird					4	2	x
Brown Thrasher	9	55	15	20	28	23	x
<u>Thrashers</u>							
Am. Robin	9	95	350	1	2,000	145	x
Hermit Thrush	2	19	1		*	3	x
Gray-cheeked Thrush		1					
Eastern Bluebird	3	38		4	16	16	x
<u>Gnatcatchers and Kinglets</u>							
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher					3	1	x
Golden-crowned Kinglet	19	101	9	2	2		x
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	22	92	26	13	30	29	x

<u>Pipits</u>							
Water Pipit	22	253	1		50	5	x
<u>Waxwings</u>							
Cedar Waxwing		188	50	*	1	3	
<u>Shrikes</u>							
Loggerhead Shrike	3	19	6	1	20	7	x
<u>Starlings</u>							
Com. Starling	350,000	2,773	55,000	439	150	251	x
<u>Vireos</u>							
White-eyed Vireo					1		x
Solitary (or Blue-headed) Vireo					1		
<u>Wood Warblers</u>							
Orange-crowned Warbler		1			1	7	x
Myrtle Warbler	13	59	21	3	1,000	695	x
Yellow-throated Warbler					2		
Pine Warbler	1	25	6		4	19	x
Palm Warbler		*			9		
Yellowthroat				1	4	1	x
<u>Weaver Finches</u>							
House Sparrow	284	445	22	109	250	257	x
<u>Blackbirds</u>							
Eastern Meadowlark	298	404	64	94	200	58	x
Red-winged Blackbird	350,000	600	185,000	92	5,000	718	x
Baltimore Oriole		1					
Rusty Blackbird	50,000	162	1,000			102	
Brewer's Blackbird					*		x
Boat-tailed Grackle					9	58	
Com. Grackle	150,000	127	50,000	71	250	1,375	x
Brown-headed Cowbird	100,000	111	210,000	10	*	25	x

	WR	Bhm	Aub	Tus	BS	Mob	DI
Finches and Sparrows	356	577	51	94	49	52	x
Cardinal			100	*		1	
Dickcissel	12	256	17		3	18	x
Evening Grosbeak	13	47	12			10	
Purple Finch	868	50	85	98	350	98	x
Pine Siskin	90	242	28	20	72	32	x
Am. Goldfinch	4	461	8	32	34	41	x
Rufous-sided Towhee		176			1		
Savannah Sparrow		1					x
Grasshopper Sparrow		19		2	100	2	x
Sharp-tailed Sparrow							x
Seaside Sparrow							x
Vesper Sparrow							x
Bachman's (or Pine-woods) Sparrow							x
Slate-colored Junco	117	923	72	12	2	20	x
Chipping Sparrow	114	50	16		125	25	x
Field Sparrow	24	551	1	68	27	3	x
White-crowned Sparrow		1			6		
White-throated Sparrow	302	1,214	95	67	500	237	x
Fox Sparrow	8	137	2	19		1	x
Swamp Sparrow	62	161	4	19	56	42	x
Song Sparrow	136	377	7	26	38	29	x
<b>Total Individuals (c)</b>	<b>1,084,035</b>	<b>14,455</b>	<b>502,442</b>	<b>1,709</b>	<b>16,634</b>	<b>16,234</b>	<b>-</b>
Total Species on count	82	86	56	47	92	128	113
Total Species within count period	83	90	63	50	99	136	113

Notes:  
 (a) Part of an estimated flock of 20 to 25 birds wintering in the Bon Secour area.  
 (b) 30 additional Least Sandpipers observed in the Birmingham count area during the count period.  
 (c) Total individuals include 2 unidentified hawks at Birmingham and 15 unidentified scaup at Bon Secour.

**Auburn:** Dec. 21, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Overcast all day with drizzle increasing to hard rain in PM; 43 degrees to 47 degrees; winds light and variable. 7 observers and 2 helpers in 3 parties; 10½ party hours; 99 party-miles (96 by car, 3 on foot). Count centered at Auburn Post Office; mixed woods 50%; pastures and open fields 30%; ponds and mudflats 20%. Participants: D. L. Bateman, Julian L. Dusi (compiler), Rosemary T. Dusi, M. C. Lyons, J. Stuart (helped by sons Brian and Tim), Z. Taylor, and B.F. Young.

**Tuscaloosa:** Dec. 31, 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Rain and fog all day with cold front in PM; 38 degrees to 48 degrees; winds easterly in AM to NW in PM, 5-10 mph with gusts up to 25 mph in PM. 6 observers in 2 parties; 17 party-hours; 35 party miles. Count centered at Broad St. and Greensboro Ave. and including Lake Nichol, Rice Mine Road, Friday Lake, Moody Swamp, Tuscaloosa Airport, Shirley Farm Road, Univ. of Ala. Arboretum and Watermelon Road. Participants: Charles Prigmore, David T. Rogers (compiler) Martha Rogers, Bernice Smalley, Charles T. Traylor, and Faith Traylor.

**Bon Secour:** Dec. 21, 6:30 AM to 5:30 PM. Cloudy, 51 degrees to 64 degrees; winds southerly, 10-26 mph. 6 observers in 3 parties; 25 party-hours (21 by car, 4 on foot); 206 party-miles (203 by car, 3 on foot). Count centered at Bon Secour Post Office and including Magnolia Springs, Foley, Gulf Shores, Gulf State Park, and Magnolia and Bon Secour Rivers; fields and pastures 40%; gulf and bay 30%; dunes, marshes, lagoons and streams 12%; prairie 12%; pine-hardwoods 3%; residential 3%. Extreme drought in Baldwin County (about 27% deficiency for the year) and burning of portions of Gulf State Park adversely affected the count. Thanks are due the Francis Weston Nature Club of Pensacola, Florida, without whose assistance the count would not have been possible this winter. Participants: P. Fairly Chandler (compiler), Lloyd Clayton, Curtis Kingsbery, Mary Lou Mottis, Ben L. Osterberg, and David H. Turpin.

**Mobile:** Dec. 22, 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Overcast AM, rain PM; 54 degrees to 70 degrees; winds S to N, 8-26 mph; wind and rain in PM cleared fog from Mobile Bay. 12 observers in 5 parties; 33 party-hours (17 by car, 16 on foot); 189 party-miles (164 by car, 25 on foot). Count centered at Lafayette and Government Sts. and including Ala. Battleship Pkwy., Mobile Bay, Spring Hill College Campus and Mobile Municipal Park; rivers, bay and ponds 23%; upland mixed woods 20%; marshes and beaches 16%; residential 13%; pastures and roadsides 13%; cultivated fields and parks 12%; bottom-land hardwoods 3%. Participants: A. B. Clark, Fr. J. L. Dorn, S. J. (compiler), Mary A. Gaillard, M. Wilson Gaillard, Ralph W. Havard, Jr., Richard E. Hayward, Jr., W. D. McDaniel, Max P. McGill, Louise N. McKinstry, Margaret E. Miller, Alice Tait, and Elizabeth R. Toenes.

**Dauphin Island-Bellingrath Gardens:** Dec. 29. Clear and cool. 15 observers. Count centered at southern tip of Mon Luis Isle and including Cedar Point, Coden, Bayou la Batre, Bellingrath Gardens, and all but westernmost 4 miles of Dauphin Island; mixed woods 28%; pine woods 20%; salt and brackish water 18%; mud and shell flats 12%; residential 12%; salt marsh 5%; freshwater marsh 3%; beaches 2%. Participants: Lois P. Archer, Fr. J. L. Dom, S. J., Mary A. Gaillard, M. Wilson Gaillard (compiler), Sybil C. Hanks, Richard E. Hayward, Jr., Ralph W. Havard, Jr., Edwin Laroux, W. D. McDaniel, Max P. McGill, Louise N. McKinstry, Genevieve and James R. Spafford, Elizabeth R. Toenes, and Billy Tonsmeire.

(Editor's note: Numerical data was not available for the Dauphin Island-Bellingrath Gardens Count.)