

THE SEASON, FALL 1970

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Fall is the season--after reproduction and before winter losses--when peak numbers of birds are present. Insects, fruits, seeds, etc. have to be abundant to support this horde and allow them to migrate successfully. So, birds are heavily dependent on the weather even before they take off on their marvelous and hazardous journeys. The very fact that they make these journeys allows them to breed and winter in the best possible surroundings and thus maintain their abundance.

This fall, although the trend of cool and dry continues, the weather could best be described as erratic. In Birmingham, September was hot--10 days with temperature 90° or over--and dry--rainfall only 1.05 inches. Thunderstorms of 23 and 24 Sep., rain on 27th and 28th, and a low of 43° on the 28th heralded a very wet October with over 4 inches excess! November brought our first temperature 32° or below--31° on the 3rd--and a change back to cool and dry weather. The October rainfall nourished plantlife sufficiently to produce a few "spring" flowers and in spite of a temperature deficiency of 2.4° in October and 4.9° in November many leaves were still on the trees in the 3rd week of November. A strong front passed through Birmingham just after midnight on the 20th, was accompanied by a heavy bird migration, and brought our season's low of 13° on the 24th.

Birmingham's 6th Annual Fall Bird Count on 10 Oct. logged a record 120 species. A cold front passed through at 6 pm the day before, and conditions were ideal for recording migrants. Significantly high counts were made on Mourning Dove, 877, E. Wood Pewee, 86, Blue Jay, 1338, and Starling, 1437; high counts were made on 6 Warblers, Myrtle, Magnolia, Black-throated Green, Chestnut-sided, Ovenbird, and Northern Waterthrush. The following species, missed on this count, may be in low numbers or their local habitat may be destroyed: Com Egret, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, all swallows, Hermit Thrush. The Mobile Club held its Dauphin-Bellingrath Fall Count on 17 Oct. and also recorded 120 species (fide JLD); for individual records see below.

Grebe, Pelicans--A Horned Grebe, earliest for the Tennessee Valley, was seen at Wheeler Refuge on 23 Oct (RMB & TE). White Pelicans on the coast peaked at 3000 at Mobile on 14 Oct (GS & JS); one was at East Lake from 22 Nov. to about 6 Dec (Mrs. RJF, FSM's & many) and was the subject of a news item with photo in the Birmingham paper. Brown Pelicans were reported relatively plentiful on the coast this season (MAG).

Hérons, Ibeses--The Reddish Egret, another bird of undeveloped beaches that used to frequent Dauphin Island all season long, was reported only on 8 and 15 Oct (LMcK). A late Snowy Egret was last seen at Lake Purdy, Birmingham on 15 Sep (HHW, HHK, PAR). The increase of Yellow-crowned Night Herons around Birmingham this year was possibly reflected in the bird at Thomas Creek on 30 Oct (TAI & JMI), by 2 weeks latest ever for Mt. Region. At Lake Purdy, the Wood Stork and the White Ibis present since mid-August, were last seen on 20 Sep (RRR). The scarcity of fish-eating birds on Wheeler Reservoir may be due to the fact that recent state testing there showed fish with as much as 2200 ppm of DDT (7 is allowable in meat for human consumption).

Waterfowl--Atkeson reports that as of late November Wheeler Refuge has 30,000 geese (up 35%) and 25,000 ducks (up 20%), very encouraging (probably due to the cessation of hunting making Wheeler once more a Refuge--TAI). The



geese include 1200 Blues and 150 Snows, the ducks mostly Mallard and Am Widgeon and with Wood Ducks in good shape. Elsewhere waterfowl were early but broke few records. An immature Whistling Swan was at Wheeler Refuge on 22 Nov, pre-Thanksgiving cold front (JK). An adult female Shoveler with 4 flightless young was at Swan Creek near Decatur on 21 Aug (JLW), but they could have been just moulting birds. Eclipse birds were at Lake Purdy on 20 Sep (RRR) and at Lake Jackson, Florala, 2, on 31 Oct (CLK et al.) Near Castleberry on 21 Nov 76 Wood Ducks were counted going to roost (CLK & RAD). Three male Ring-necked Ducks summered successfully at East Lake, Birmingham--7th successive year for the species (RRR). First Canvasbacks for this year were early, 3 or 4 on 18 Oct at East Lake (JRB). Seven early Com Goldeneye were on Dauphin on 28 Nov (LRT) and early Bufflehead were at River Falls on 21 Nov. (CLK & RAD) and Gulf State Park on 23 Nov. (MAG & LMcK) Four female or immature Surf Scoters showed up at Gulf State Park with the strong pre-Thanksgiving cold front on 21 Nov. (LRT & LPA) and next day were joined by 3 female or immature Com Scoters (LRT & LPA); all 7 remained through the 28th (many). A Ruddy Duck on 25 Oct at Mobile (REH) is earliest for the Gulf Coast by a week.

Hawks--Numbers of nearly all hawks are drastically reduced, but at least a few individuals of nearly all species manage to be recorded each year. Latest ever for the state by almost a month was a Mississippi Kite on Dauphin Island on 17 Oct (ELR). The decline of Cooper's Hawks seems to be much greater than that of the Sharp-shinned so that the latter appears comparatively more numerous in the last few years. The only eagle reported this fall was an immature Bald at Wheeler Refuge, no date (TZA). The first Peregrine was on Dauphin on 19 Sep (LPA & LRT), few were seen thereafter; around Birmingham 3 on 10 Oct. 2 were at Oak Mountain (MHP & MFP) and 1 at Lake Purdy also next day (RRR).

Shorebirds--A Black-bellied Plover at Lake Purdy on 10 & 11 Oct (RRR) is only the second Mt. Region record, both fall. A Ruddy Turnstone, obviously lost, was seen picking up scraps at a Fort Payne drive-in on 13 Sep (EMW's). 2nd Mt. Region record. A Whimbrel on 8 July at Mobile is by 8 days earliest ever for state (JLD, LD, BD). A Willet at Wheeler Refuge on 1 Nov (JLW) is by just over a month the latest ever inland record. Four Knots were seen on Dauphin on 28 Nov (JK & WW's). A Baird's Sandpiper at Lake Purdy on 24 Sep (JNC & HHK) is the 3rd inland record (all Mt. Region); and 4 of the 5 state records are in September. For the 3rd fall in a row the Dunlin has been recorded at Lake Purdy, this time a highest ever was that of 6 on 31 Oct (HHK, ALM, & RRR), and the latest ever anywhere inland, one on 26 Nov (RRR). Buff-breasted Sandpipers were seen at Lake Purdy--2nd fall in the Mt. Region--on 5 & 6 Sep, 1 (RRR et al); 13 Sep, 2 (KTK); 20 Sep, 1 (RRR); and 24 Sep (JNC & HHK) ties latest inland. A Marbled Godwit was on Dauphin on 25 Sep (AGT & LRT). A Sanderling was at Lake Purdy on 12, 16 & 26 Sep (HHK et al.) Avocets were first noted at Mobile on 31 Oct, flock of 9 (LPA & LMcK) and another 8 on 11 & 12 Nov at Wheeler Refuge (ENW, TPS & JLD) are latest ever inland.

Gulls & Terns--A heavy concentration of gulls roosting near Fort Morgan in November included at least 3000 Herring, nearly all immature, 200 Ring-billed, and 3000 Laughing on 13 Nov (TAI & JMI). Two Franklin's Gulls at Mobile on 25 Oct (REH) are only the 3rd Alabama record, first in fall. The movement of terns down the Chattahoochee this fall was reported very good, especially Forster's.

Common, & Black (LAW). A few least terns were also seen, 1 at Lake Purdy on 19 Sep (HHK & KTK) is the 3rd Mt. Region record, and 2 on 5 Oct on Lake Oliver (LAW) only the 6th for the Piedmont. Sandwich Terns were abundant at Gulf State Park on 28 Nov (REH, LMCK & MEM). Caspian Terns were at Lake Purdy on 19 Sep, 3 (HHK & KTK) and one on 10 & 11 Oct (RRR) latest ever Mt. Region.

Cuckoos, Goatsuckers—Cuckoos lingered late; a Yellow-billed in Birmingham on 4 Nov (HHK) is exceeded by only 2 other records, (9 Nov '67 & 13 Nov '65); a Black-billed at Jasper on 16 Oct (TAI & HHK) is latest for Mt. Region by 6 days; but one just below Mitchell Dam on the Coosa R. on 10 Dec (MFP & MHP) is almost a month later than any other Alabama record. A Whip-poor-will was flushed on Dauphin Is. on 17 Oct (JLD et al.) The Com Nighthawk peaked at 70-80 in Birmingham on 10 Sep (RRR); 2 or 3 were still present on 31 Oct (GA); and one remained to 20 Nov (RDB), by 2 weeks latest ever for the state.

Swift, Hummingbird, Woodpeckers—Six Chimney Swifts in Birmingham at East Lake on 21 Oct (RRR) tie latest for Mt. Region. The last Ruby-throated Hummingbird seen in Birmingham was on 23 Oct (SM) but in Mobile one was seen as late as 29 Nov (JLD). A loose flock of 6 Red-headed Woodpeckers was noted flying southwest late in the afternoon of 10 Sep at Thomas Creek, Birmingham (TAI). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Spring Hill on 9 Oct (MAG) is early for the coast.

Flycatchers—Western Kingbirds were fairly common on the coast, first, 22 Sep on Dauphin (JLD), last on 28 Nov on Dauphin (JK & WW's). At least 2 Scissor-tails were listed, 3 Oct at Coden (LPA & LRT) and 12 Nov on Dauphin (AGT & LRT). This Flycatcher has been recorded every month of the year in Alabama, but only once each in August and September and both inland. Except for these 2, the 3 Oct record is earliest fall for the state. Banders continue to provide excellent data on Empidonaxes; of 39 banded by 3 banders this fall, 13 were Least, 10 Yellow-bellied, and 8 each Traill's and Acadian. Migration peak was 12 Sep when Hayward banded 11 (5 Traill's) out of 23 and Kittinger 2 of 13. The first Olive-sided Flycatcher was on Dauphin on 13 Aug (LRT); birds were seen near Lake Purdy on 12, 19, 20 (2), and 24 Sep (HHK et al.) A Vermilion Flycatcher was by 4 days earliest ever for state, on 8 Oct on Dauphin (LPA & LRT).

Nuthatch, Wrens, Thrushes—The Red-breasted Nuthatch seemed to migrate backwards in its off year; 28 Sep, Dauphin Island (LRT, MAG & JLD); 30 Sep, Mobile, (MAG); 4 Oct, Bankhead Forest (RRR); 10 Oct, Birmingham (HBT). On 10 Oct., 3 Bewick's Wrens were in Birmingham (TAI). An early Winter Wren was on Dauphin on 17 Oct (fide MAG). Six marsh wrens, both species, were listed in Birmingham on 10 Oct (HHK, JNC, GBC). An early Robin was at Dog R., Mobile on 21 Oct (LMCK). A late Wood Thrush was in Birmingham on 27 Oct., 4 days latest Mt. Region (PAR). Migrant brown thrushes (Swainson's, Gray-cheeked, and Veery) seem to be getting scarcer. (Compared to Wood and Hermit—which latter aren't too numerous--Kittinger in Birmingham banded 3 migrant to 4 Wood-Hermit, on Dauphin, Hayward banded 14 migrant to 14 Wood-Hermit. A bright spot on the E. Bluebird picture is that of 15 counted at Lake Purdy on 20 Sep (VT et al.)

Kinglet, Waxwing, Vireos—Golden-crowned Kinglets were first noted in the Bankhead Forest on 16 Oct, 14 birds (TAI & HHK); in Birmingham on 18 Oct (HHW); and on Dauphin on 31 Oct (REH, MEM, & LRT). The Cedar Waxwing sometimes breeds in Alabama the year following a winter of abundance. After last winter's record-breaking flocks no breeding evidence was reported, however 2 early fall records are suspicious, Dauphin Island, 13 Sep (PEH & LRT) and Bankhead Forest, a pair on 2 Oct (TAI & HHW). A Yellow-throated Vireo on Dauphin

on 28 Nov (JK & WW's), is 4 weeks later than any migrants, however the species has wintered twice on the coast. Philadelphia Vireos were reported quite regularly from Birmingham and Dauphin Island, and one on 30 Aug on Dauphin (LRT) is by 2 weeks earliest ever for the state.

Warblers general—Presenting a great variety of colors and patterns, warblers always put on a good show for the bird-watcher, even in fall. This year, counts were overshadowed by banding totals; 19 species were seen in Birmingham on 10 Oct (B.A.S.), 22 species on 17 Oct (M.B.C.), and 17 species on 30 Oct (MAG et al); 28 and 29 Sep were big banding days on Dauphin Island with Tuck Hayward and Margaret Miller; total 331 birds banded! Hayward banded 21 species of warblers on 28th, 13 species on the 29th, and 27 species for the month of September! Among 85 warblers of 14 species banded this fall at S.U.N.A. in Birmingham by the Kittingers, the top 3 were Magnolia, 23; Yellowthroat, 17; and Tennessee, 12. Among the 28 species banded by Hayward on Dauphin, the top 3 were Yellowthroat, 115; Am Redstart, 31; and Magnolia, 16--note 2 species common to both!

Warblers, specific—A Prothonotary Warbler banded on 27 Sep on Dauphin (REH) and a Swainson's Warbler--latest of 3--banded on 11 Oct there (REH) are both late but not the latest ever. A Lawrence's Warbler banded on Dauphin on 28 Sep (MEM) is the 6th Alabama record of this hybrid, 1st in fall. A fat immature female Tennessee Warbler banded in Birmingham on 7 Nov (TAI) is very late but not latest. Early Orange-crowned Warblers reached Birmingham and the coast in September; one on the 17th at Glenn H.S. (IFS & NR) is exceeded by but one record (11 Sep '57, Gadsden); the other on the 28th was on Dauphin (JLD & MAG).


A Yellow Warbler in Birmingham on 10 Oct (GBC & GC) ties the latest Mt. Region record. Magnolia Warblers for all their abundance produced no new extremes, but one on 4 Nov on Dauphin (MAG) was within 3 days of a state late date. A Cape May Warbler on Dauphin on 23 Sep (REH, MEM, LRT) indicates that this species occurs this far west annually. Exactly the same can be said of another Atlantic Coast migrant, the Black-throated Blue Warbler, seen on 21 Oct in Spring Hill, Mobile (LA) and on 30 Oct on Dauphin (LMCK, MWG & LRT). The first Myrtle Warbler reached Dauphin on 28 Sep (JLD & MAG) and the Mt. Region on 2 Oct, Bankhead Forest (TAI & HHW). Black-throated Green Warblers were reported as abundant in the Tennessee Valley (Mrs. HG), last at Decatur on 31 Oct (Mrs. HG) is latest for Ten. V. by 5 days; abundant in Mt. Region, 30 listed in Birmingham on 10 Oct (B.A.S.); "very plentiful" on the coast (MAG). 1 on 14 Nov on Dauphin (TAI, LRT, JMI) is latest for state except for wintering birds. An immature Sutton's Warbler on the Shell Mounds on Dauphin Island on 14 Nov (TAI) thoroughly astounded this writer (See Note). A rather late Ovenbird on 16 Oct in the Bankhead Forest was probably on its breeding territory (TAI & HHK); another late one on 14 Nov on Dauphin was banded, had no fat, was recovering from a tarsal fracture, weighed 15.9 gms (normal 20-26), and is latest ever for the state by 6 days (TAI & JMI). A Connecticut Warbler on Dauphin Is. on 17 Oct (LA) ties the latest date for the state and a Mourning Warbler banded on Dauphin on 12 Sep (REH) continues to indicate regular migratory status for these two species. Of the 115 Yellowthroats banded by Hayward on Dauphin in September, 22 were banded on the 28th and 52 on the 29th. Wilson's Warbler, common on the coast (MAG), tied the coastal plain arrival date with 1 on Dauphin on 7 Sep (LRT & LPA). More than usual Canada Warblers were on the coast this September (MAG); in Birmingham a late bird was banded on 6 Oct. (RJK) and one there on 13 Oct (ALM) is latest inland. Of 31 Am Redstarts banded by Hayward in September, 11

were on the 28th and 17 on the 29th.

Blackbirds, Tanager— In the Southeast, Yellow-headed Blackbirds appear to be more common in spring, and they seem to bypass Alabama; this season doubled our fall records to 6 in contrast to 1 spring record. On 9 Sep an adult male was at Eufaula Refuge (JM), first and only inland record; from 15 to 26 Sep, 2 birds were on Dauphin (REH, MEM, LRT) and on 3 Oct another was on Dauphin (JLD). In Birmingham a lone male Bullock's Oriole was seen on 11 Sep (ELG), 2 days earlier than coastal records. The presence of the Baltimore Oriole as a breeder in west Alabama was firmly established by a display of Sumter County nests at our fall meeting (JJ); the species is probably thinly scattered as a breeder throughout our western tier of counties. A late Western Tanager was on Dauphin on 15 Oct (LMcK).

Finches— On 20 Oct groups of 5 or 6 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks constantly flew from east to west across the highway between Jasper and Grayson from 7 to 9 am; involving a minimum of 50 birds (TAI & HHW). A Black-headed Grosbeak on 4 Oct on Dauphin (LPA & LRT) is the 11th record since 1957. A Blue Grosbeak on Dauphin on 13 Nov (REH) is exceeded by but one record, 29 Nov '57. A late Indigo Bunting was banded at S.U.N.A. on 31 Oct (RJK) but at the Shell Mounds on Dauphin on 14 Nov at least 30 birds were still present (TAI, JMI, LPA, LRT). Two Evening Grosbeaks in suburban Birmingham on 10 Oct (MHP & MFP) in the absence of any other records for the season to date are probably lingering immatures that summered nearby. The first Purple Finch in Birmingham was late on 15 Nov (HHW). Only one Pine Siskin was noted this fall, on 21 Nov in Birmingham (HHW). The 3rd Lark Bunting for Alabama was one seen on Dauphin on 15 Sep (REH, MEM & LRT). A LeConte's Sparrow in Mobile on 25 Oct (REH) gives the Gulf Coast an arrival date more in line with north Alabama. Three Lark Sparrows were on the coast on 27 Sep, 1 on Dauphin (banded--MEM) and 2 in Baldwin County (LPA & LRT). Perhaps Bachman's Sparrow is not as rare as thought north of the coastal flatwoods; 3 were reported around Birmingham, 30 Aug (WFC), 12 Sep (HHK), & 28 Sep (banded--RJK). The arrival of Slate-colored Juncos was reported thus: first, 1 on 4 Oct in the Bankhead Forest 1 (RRR); Birmingham, 10 Oct (RRR); Bankhead Forest on 16 Oct, 34 birds (TAI & HHK); Dauphin Island on 30 Oct (LMcK, LRT, MWG). Two Clay-colored Sparrows were banded on Dauphin, 1 on 27 Sep (REH) and another on 17 Oct (MEM), bringing the number of records to 10 and enhancing the belief that the species occurs annually in Alabama. A peak of 7 White-crowned Sparrows was logged on Dauphin on 17 Nov (LRT). The first Whitethroat in Birmingham was on 2 Oct (PAR); by the 17th over 40 were counted at Thomas Creek alone (TAI); by the 18th the first one was at Spring Hill (MAG). Although Fox Sparrows were slow in arriving, the first one on 19 Oct in Birmingham (HHW) ties the earliest Mt. Region record. In Birmingham, one Lincoln's Sparrow was seen at Thomas Creek on 30 Oct (JMI & TAI) and another was banded at S.U.N.A. next day (RJK & HHK). An early Swamp Sparrow was on Dauphin on 4 Oct (LRT & LPA).

Observers— (reporters in capitals) - Lois Almon, Lois P. Archer, Gussie Arnett, THOMAS Z. ATKESON, Richard M. Bays, Birmingham Audubon Society, J. Russell Bailey, ANDREW K. BATES, Raymond D. Bates, G. Bradley Carlisle, Greg Carlisle, Jack N. Carusos, Bill Denton, Leo Denton, J. L. Derden (JLDe), PEV. J. L. DORN (JLD), Robert A. Duncan, Tony Estes, Mrs. R. J. Feenker, MARY A. GAILLARD, M. Wilson Gaillard, Mrs. Harrison Garrett, Emmy Lou Grimley, R. E. (TUCK) HAYWARD, John M. Imhof, Thomas A. Imhof, Jenkins



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SUTTON'S WARBLER IN ALABAMA

On 14 November at the Shell Mounds on Dauphin Island I spent a good 3 minutes watching a Sutton's Warbler with 10 x 50 binoculars in 5 different spots between 20 and 30 feet away and about 3 feet off the ground. It was in a mature live oak, then a large cedar. The bird is best described as a Parula Warbler from the neck down and a Yellow-throated Warbler from the neck up. The bird showed the yellowish-green, squarish back patch of a Parula Warbler, the head of an immature Yellow-throated Warbler, and the yellow throat, white belly, and white in tail common to both. The flanks had no streaks, and the sides of head no large black patch or white patch as in an adult Yellow-throated. The broad head stripes were not as contrastingly marked as in an adult Yellow-throated—exactly what one would expect in a hatching year bird. The bird was the size of a Yellow-throated, not as tiny as a Parula.

This bird, apparently a hybrid between the Parula and Yellow-throated Warblers, was first discovered in eastern panhandle West Virginia (Potomac Valley) through the courtesy of George A. Hall, Editor of the Wilson Bulletin and a Professor at West Virginia University and Chandler S. Robbins of the Migratory Bird Populations Station at Laurel, Md. the following information was obtained. Three non-breeding season records are for Wilmington, N. C., Bull's Island, S. C., Georgia (Coastal?) by Dorothy Neal, and possibly two others. Apparently there are no records since 1950.

This warbler apparently resulted from the Yellow-throated Warbler extending its range up the Potomac Valley. The individual pioneering birds sometimes found themselves without a mate because the species was so thinly scattered and population pressures prevented them from returning to the main range. The Yellow-throated Warbler has now extended its range farther up the Potomac, and so the Dauphin record may indicate that possibly another pioneering individual found itself far beyond the main body of the species during the breeding season, and so mated with a Parula.

It appears that hybrid warblers are not too rare; most active bird students have met with more than one warbler that could not be identified because it was an obvious hybrid, and few of these people in the East have not recorded the Blue-winged-Golden-winged hybrids. If large organisms have to be very closely related in order to mate and produce fertile offspring, it appears that many warbler genera, particularly the monotypic ones, are on an unsound basis.

This record is, of course, the first for Alabama. The November date is not unduly late when one considers that both the Parula and Yellow-throated Warblers winter annually in the same county, Mobile County. Because this bird reached Dauphin Island, however, the probability is greater that it will fly across the Gulf to Central America.

The scientific name of Sutton's Warbler is *Dendroica potomac*, but if a hybrid as believed now, it should be *Parula americana* x *Dendroica dominica*.