

# ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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### POLLUTION IN PARADISE!

. . . . I found discarded beer cans and the ever-present aluminum twistoff tops. Under the palm trees on the black sand beach at the bay named for explorer Captain Cook, I saw picnic garbage discarded by thoughtless tourists. Our guide explained in dismay that a group of Americans had been there the previous day. Oliver S. Johnson

SEE YOU AT DAUPHIN ISLAND CONVENTION  
FRIDAY, APRIL 28-29-30

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### THE SEASON, WINTER (December—January—February) 1972

Compiler and Editor — Thomas A. Imhof

The year 1971 was cool and rather wet in Birmingham and vicinity, but Mobile and other coastal areas remained very dry through January. In Birmingham, December was the second warmest ever, and, except for a few cold snaps, it remained rather warm through January. February was cooler and wetter throughout the state. Normally, many birds listed around Christmas disappear—they either move farther south or succumb to the elements. This year it appears that many of these half-hardy birds could still be found in February, even those that were wintering farther north than usual. Certainly the thermometer dipped about as low as usual—to 7° on 16 Jan and 6 Feb—but apparently these spells were brief and the intervening warm spells were

longer and milder. To complete this picture of our winter birdlife, please refer to the excellent analysis of our Christmas Counts in this issue.

**LOON, GREBES** — The count of 130 Com Loons at Gulf Shores on 22 Jan (TI & JP) is a state max. Two Eared Grebes remained around Dauphin I. thru early Jan (LT, mob) and 2 were at Gulf Shores 8-22 Jan (FC, JP, TI). Estimates of flocks on both sides of Mobile Bay indicate that over 1000 Horned Grebes wintered in coastal Alabama (LT, TI, MAG, mob).

**FULL-WEBBED SWIMMERS** — Of the small flock of White Pelicans wintering in Mississippi Sound, 1 was found dead on Dauphin (Mr Harper) on 21 Nov with a band placed on it as a young bird this July in North Dakota (LT and others). This is the first winter since 1959 that we have had more than 6 Brown Pelicans reported from our coastline; 5-12 were noted on most birding trips on both sides of the Bay with a max of 26 on 19 Dec (MWG, LT, mob). An adult Blue-faced Booby—possibly 2 im. nearby—at Alabama Point on 22 Jan (TI, JP) is the 3rd for Alabama. Perhaps we should search more for Boobies in the colder months when the cooling of surface waters effects a strong upwelling of nutrients from the depths and the fishing is good. Further, Gulf Shores produced a count of 85 Gannets on 22 Jan (TI, JP) and Ft. Morgan 550 D-cr Cormorants on 23 Jan (TI, JP).

**HERONS** — Green Herons, which apparently winter every year on our coast, were noted often in Feb; Alabama Point on 8 Jan (CLK, mob); Magnolia Springs on 20 Jan and 17 Feb (FC); Fairhope on 6 Feb (LEG, MW); Dog R. Dec thru 14 Feb (LMc). Three winter Reddish Egrets were noted; 2 at Piney Pt on 15 Dec (TCO) & 1 white-phase on Cochrane Causeway on 12 Feb (LEG, mob).

**WATERFOWL** — The situation seems about normal or slightly above, and with few rarities. Up to 3 adult & 1 im. Whistling Swans wintered at Wheeler (TA) and 1 at Eufaula (JEK). Oldsquaws were noted at L. Oliver on 1 Dec (LAW); at Navy Cove on 8 Jan (CLK, mob); & at Cullman on 13 Feb TMW & MW).

**HAWKS** — The 2nd Swainson's Hawk for the Mt. Region was at L. Purdy on 3 Jan (HHK, AM). A pair of Golden Eagles wintered at Simpson Sanct., Clarke Co. (JEK). At Wheeler, 1-3 Bald Eagles lingered most of the period (TA) & an im. was at Pell City on 7 Jan (HHK, RM). Peregrines were noted at Fink's L., Calhoun Co. on 20 Nov (WC); near Eufaula Ref on 5 Feb (TM & HM); and on Dauphin on 15 Feb (LW & WW). On 24 Jan, 7 Sparrow Hawks were counted between Ft. Morgan and Gulf Shores (TI, JP).

**SANDHILL CRANE** — The flock wintering at Gulf Shores was tallied at 27 on 22 Jan (FC, TI, JP) and 24 on 19 Feb (T, mob).

**SHOREBIRDS** — Six Oystercatchers remained near Dauphin thru 8 Jan (LT) when they probably sought a more sheltered spot. At Alabama Point 4 Snowy Plovers were present on 22 Jan (JP, TI). The Golden Plover present at Marion on 13 & 19 Sep (JP, mob) was omitted from the fall report. A max of 10 Am Woodcock was reported from Wheeler on 12 Feb (MB, AOS mob). Near Phenix City on 12 Dec, Spotted Sandpipers were noted at L. Harding and Goat Rock Dams (JM, LAW); 1 at Wheeler on 12 Feb (MB, AOSmob) is the first in winter in the Tennessee Valley; and the Dauphin I. bird was still present on 13 Feb (LT). Knots, wintering again in numbers on Dauphin, reached a max of 66 on 24 Dec and dwindled to 12 on 13 Mar (LT). One Marbled Godwit remained at the n. end of Little Dauphin thru 8 Jan (LT) and 4 others were on Cochrane Causeway on 11 Dec (FC). A second species of phalarope was recorded from

L. Purdy this winter when a Red stayed from 5 to 9 Jan (JP, BASmob, photo HHK, HHW).

**GULLS** — Over 100 Ring-billed Gulls were at Goat Rock Dam near Phenix City on 5 Mar (JM). At Gulf Shores and Ft. Morgan 1400 Bonaparte's Gulls were counted on 22 & 23 Jan (TI, JP).

**DOVE, COCKOO, OWL, HUMMINGBIRD** — On Dauphin on 6 Feb, 2 White-winged Doves were flushed (EBM). At Gulf Shores on 21 Jan, the 2nd winter Black-billed Cuckoo for the state was seen well (AN). The Burrowing Owl that wintered on Dauphin was last reported on 28 Feb, (JS & GS). Hummingbirds, probably Ruby-throated, were noted in Magnolia Springs, 1 on 22 Jan and 2 on 24 Jan (DB).

**FLYCATCHERS, MARTIN** — A W. Kingbird remained on Dauphin to 22 Dec (MWM) and a Scissor-tailat Bayou La Batre thru 15 Dec (CM). First-reported Purple Martins were: 25 Jan at Magnolia Springs, 1 (DB); 5 Feb, 15 at Cuba, Sumter Co (RB & SB); 7 Feb at Mobile (DW); 16 Feb, 4 at Indian Springs, Shelby Co (JAM).

**WRENS, CATBIRD, THRUSHES** — A House Wren at Wheeler on 13 Feb (MB, AOSmob) is the first Tennessee Valley record for that month. At the other end of the state, a Carolina Wren was feeding young in the nest at Magnolia Springs on 28 Feb (FC). Catbirds, numerous on the coast, provided a max of 22, 7 banded, on 23 Jan, Gulf Shores to Ft Morgan (TI, JP). Robins were abundant in many places and throughout the period; about 50,000 roosted near Lane Pk, Birmingham in Jan (JP); 5300 were estimated at Gulf Shores on 22 Jan (JP, TI). At Tuscaloosa, 25 E. Bluebirds were counted on 4 Dec (JCT); and between Kewanee, Ms and Tuscaloosa, 26 were counted (RB & SB).

**GNATCATCHER, PIPIT, WAXWING** — Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were especially common in south Baldwin Co thru Jan (FC); 1 in Birmingham on 10, 21 & 24 Dec (Kittingers) is the only winter record north of the Fall Line. Water Pipits were scarce to absent nearly throughout the state and the period and were missed on the Birmingham Count! Cedar Waxwings were notably abundant during the colder weather; 2000 on 12 Jan in 1 part of Birmingham (TI) also 2000 on 25 Jan in another part of Birmingham (GH); 90 at Ft Morgan on 23 Jan (TI, JP); 1000 at Spring Hill on 25 Feb (JD, MAG); 600 at Dog R. on 9 Mar (MAM); 600 more in Mobile, same week (REH).

**VIREO, WARBLERS** — A Solitary Vireo on 12 Feb at Crumley's Chapel, Birmingham (TI) indicates good winter survival. Our farthest north winter Orange-crowned Warbler, 1 at Decatur since Dec, is still present in Mar (CRG, photo). A count of 4600 Myrtle Warblers at Gulf Shores on 22 Jan (TI, JP) barely shows how abundant was this species on the coast this winter.

**ICTERIDS** — Each winter more Orioles seem to be attracted to Alabama feeders; a slice of orange seems the best attractant. A few of this season's records: a female Orchard in Crestline, Birmingham on 16 Jan, temp 7<sup>o</sup> (JRB); Baltimores, a female in Birmingham on 7 Dec (RT); a male in Birmingham on 4 Jan (ES); a male & 2 females in Montgomery on 11 Mar (JB, MB, RB). Five Brewer's Blackbirds at Wheeler on 12 Feb (MB, AOSmob) are unusual in late winter in the Tennessee Valley.

**FINCHES** — A female Black-headed Grosbeak at a Roebuck feeder on 25 Feb (GH) is the 5th inland, 2nd for Birmingham area. Evening Grosbeaks,

scarce before Christmas, have become widespread north of the Fall Line; Hartselle, Jan thru Mar (CRG); Scottsboro, 4-20 daily 15 Jan to Mar (BGW); Birmingham high counts 50 at Crestline on 14 Jan (BJB) and 50-100 in Mt Brook on 21 Feb (NDP); farthest south so far reported this season, Marion on 1 Feb (DA). Purple Finch is THE finch of the winter, especially around Birmingham—highest ever on Christmas Count and 300 daily in Hoover alone 20 Jan—Mar (OP); even near the coast it became common after 15 Jan (FC). The HOUSE FINCH became the first addition to the Alabama list for 1972 when 5, 1 red, were seen on 2 Jan in Birmingham (TI). (In Columbus, Ga, 5 were seen on 5 Mar by JM.) This species was released on Long Island, NY about 10-15 years ago by cage-bird dealers getting rid of evidence of illegal traffic in native songbirds. A Redpoll was noted at a Roebuck feeder in early Jan & 6 Feb during very cold weather (GH); we now have 7 records for the state, all northern half during severe cold. Pine Siskins were common early, dropped off for about a month, then since about 20 Jan have been widespread and locally abundant, especially in the Mt Region. On 4 Dec, 50 were in Bluff Pk, Birmingham (NGB) and 60 at Tuscaloosa on alders (JCT); only 20 were listed on the Birmingham Count; 25 were in Pell City on 7 Jan (HHK, RM); Hoover, Birmingham, an estimated 40 were present from 20 Jan into Mar (OP); about 1 Feb, one Mobile feeder seemed to have all the local birds, 150 (TF); in Brighton, Birmingham on 15 Feb, 163 were counted (TI); birds were at Marion on 11 Feb (DA) and Fairhope on 20 Feb (LT, LA).

**SPARROWS** — Netting operations around Birmingham indicate that weeds play a major role in winter survival of sparrows. For years now large numbers of sparrows and other seed-eaters concentrate on an abandoned dump turned weedy field where seeds are available in enormous quantities. Field counts and number of birds banded—187 Dec. to Feb—indicate that one 11-acre field at Thomas Creek sustained at least 600 sparrows, mostly Whitethroat, Song, Swamp, Field, Savannah, and Fox. The Clay-colored Sparrow is fast providing evidence of annual occurrence; at least 11 records, 9 coastal, & 5 birds banded, since the first known bird was seen in Nov 1959. One in Foley on 18 Jan (FC) is the latest ever. An im. Harris' Sparrow, still at a Mt Olive feeder since 13 Jan (HM, BASmob, photo many) becomes the 4th record—6th bird—for Alabama, 2nd in Mt Region. In Birmingham, the northeasternmost Alabama wintering locality for the Lincoln's Sparrow, several were seen at Thomas Creek throughout the period and 2 were banded, 13 Dec & 21 Feb (TI).

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