



THE 1971 CHRISTMAS COUNTS

With the expansion of the AOS area to include Northwest Florida, a record nine counts were conducted. The new area contributed three—Pensacola, Bay County (Panama City), and Marianna—which featured a number of significant observations for winter on the Gulf Coast, including a Barn Swallow at Pensacola, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Sandwich Tern in Bay County, and a Swallow-tailed Kite and two immature Broad-winged Hawks at Marianna. The status of all these species ranges from rare to accidental on the Alabama and Northwest Florida Gulf Coast in winter, their regular wintering grounds being in South or Southwest Florida and below the U. S. border.

The most noteworthy observation in the area was probably the five House Finches carefully observed at Birmingham by its indefatigable compiler, Mr. Tom Imhof. As those familiar with developments in eastern birdlife know, this finch (which is in the same genus as the Purple Finch) was released on Long Island, has spread down the eastern seaboard, reached Atlanta in 1970 and this year found its way to Birmingham.

The addition of Northwest Florida resulted in five counts for the Gulf Coast area and a number of observations of wading birds that rarely winter this far north. The population expansion of the Cattle Egret probably accounted for its first count records at Eufaula Refuge (7), even farther north in the Alabama Coastal Plains and at Mobile (3), a high count (5) for Dauphin I., and a single bird at Pensacola. Pensacola also featured its second winter record for Yellow-crowned Night Herons—an adult and 8 immatures (the other record being on its 1970 Christmas count), and adult birds were seen at Mobile and Dauphin Island. Rounding out the normally only summering wading birds were Green Herons at Mobile, Pensacola and Bay Co. and a White Ibis within the count period in Bay Co. Also in the wading bird category were 59 Black-crowned Night Herons at Eufaula Refuge, the highest known state record for Alabama, and two Common Egrets at Wheeler Refuge where a few winter approximately every other year.

In the endangered raptor category, it is comforting to note three immature Bald Eagles at Wheeler Refuge, Peregrine Falcons at Pensacola and Eufaula Refuge, and an Osprey in Bay Co. In addition, the 11 Brown Pelicans at Dauphin I. was a small increase over last year and 7 were observed in Bay Co.

Probably the outstanding shorebird observation was the Marbled Godwit that has been wintering at Dauphin I. Other interesting birds of the water and shore included 9 Am Oystercatchers, 4 Knots and 3 Eared Grebes at Dauphin I., the Am. Avocets for the eighth out of the last nine Christmas counts at Mobile, 3 Lesser Yellowlegs observed as far north as Wheeler Refuge for a Tennessee Valley record, 3 Whistling Swans within the count period there, and 3 Gull-billed Terns at Bay Co. In abundance of water birds, Dauphin I. reported a record 3,000 Double-crested Cormorants, and there were 78 White Pelicans at Bay Co. High although not record counts for waterfowl were noted for the Redhead in Bay Co. (2,050) for the Blue Goose (2,000—possible a record) and Pintail (almost 3,700) at Wheeler Refuge. The Gulf Coast is, of course, the place to see Common Loons and Horned Grebes in winter as indicated by the number of the former at Pensacola and the latter both there and at Dauphin I.

Leading the non-passerine land bird category were the dark-phased Rough-legged Hawk at the Birmingham Airport, its second count record and the third for a dark-phased bird in Alabama, and a western visitor, the Burrowing Owl at Dauphin I. Energetic nighttime counting resulted in 7 Screech Owls at Birmingham and 6 in Bay Co. A Ringed Turtle Dove, reported as now breeding around Panama City, was recorded for the third time in the last five Christmas count periods on the Bay Co. count, which also reported a high number of 26 Ground Doves. In Birmingham a record 24 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers was reported, and 6 more were found at Jacksonville. The Birmingham figure may be a nat-

ional record for the 1971 counts since it equals the all-time record set last year at Charleston, S.C. Birmingham also reported high counts for Flickers (164) and Red-headed Woodpeckers (83), while at Wheeler Refuge the 24 Sparrow Hawks were only one short of last year's Christmas count record for inland Ala.

In the passerine category, one of the leading reports was of another western visitor—two Western Kingbirds at Dauphin I. The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was notable in two respects—the first winter record for the Mountain Region being reported within the count period at Birmingham, and a high count of 49 being recorded at Pensacola. For the second consecutive year, and Oregon Junco was painstakingly picked out of a flock of Slate-coloreds on the Birmingham count, which also for the second consecutive year recorded a Lincoln's Sparrow and a high count for Cedar Waxwings (the state record having been set there last year). Passerines that winter in rare to uncommon numbers on the Gulf Coast included the Dickcissel on the Spring Hill College Campus at Mobile (its third record for the last five Christmas counts), three Rough-winged Swallows also at Mobile and a Yellow-breasted Chat within the count period there, a Parula Warbler within the count period at Pensacola, two Black-and-White Warblers at Bay Co., Yellow-throated Warblers at Dauphin I. and Bay Co., a Baltimore Oriole within the count period at the latter, and White-eyed Vireos at Bay County and Marianna. Also of interest at Mobile were the two Henslow's Sparrows and on the Wheeler Refuge count a pair of Brewer's Blackbirds, uncommon and local in winter in the Tennessee Valley, that were feeding with a flock of cowbirds. Marianna recorded record numbers of Loggerhead Shrikes (59) and Chipping Sparrows (681), it being reported, however, that large flocks of the latter are not uncommon in winter in that area. Also of interest at Marianna were the good numbers of Eastern Phoebes (28) and Turkey Vultures (62) and the large concentration of 4,000 Fish Crows.

This seems to have been a good winter for Robins in the AOS area since Christmas count records were set at Wheeler Refuge, Birmingham, Dauphin I., Pensacola and Bay Co. The House Wren also seems to have done well with one being observed as far north as Wheeler Refuge where it is rare in winter and good number being recorded in Mobile (12) and Bay Co. (16). Also doing well were the Myrtle Warbler with high counts at Dauphin I. (A Gulf Coast record), Mobile and Bay Co., and the White-throated Sparrow with record counts at Birmingham and Wheeler Refuge. The winter of 1971-72 might be considered only a moderate "finch" year. Evening Grosbeaks were observed on two counts—Birmingham and Jacksonville, where the 122 was a count record; but there were large numbers of Purple Finches as evidenced by the record 454 at Birmingham. On the other hand, observed in comparatively low numbers in count areas were the Eastern Bluebird, Rufous-sided Towhee, Eastern Meadowlark and Savannah Sparrow, the reduction in numbers reported for the last two undoubtedly being due to destruction of available habitat around urban areas where most of the counts are conducted.

On the 1971 counts, 189 species were recorded (including the Rock Dove initially reported last year) and 6 additional species were seen within the count period. Four of the region's ornithological areas were sampled—Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (WWR) in the Tennessee Valley; Birmingham (Bhm) and Jacksonville (Jvl) in the Mountain Region; Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge (EWR) in the Coastal Plain; and five counts on the Gulf Coast, Mobile (Mob), Dauphin Island-Bellingrath Gardens (DI), Pensacola (Pen) Marianna (Mar) and Bay Co. (BC). For other counts in Florida and nearby counts in the adjacent states of Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee that would be of interest to AOS observers, see Vol. 26, No. 2 of American Birds (now incorporating Audubon Field Notes). Birds seen on the AOS counts were as follows, those indicated by the symbol * being reported during the count period (December 18 through January 2) but not on the count date:

	WWR	Bhm	Jvl	EWR	Mob	DI	Pen	Mar	BC
Thrashers									
Mockingbird	69	217	55	9	43	117	116	50	107
Catbird	-	-	-	-	3	3	4	2	14
Brown Thrasher	37	70	13	6	18	15	19	19	17
Thrushes									
Am. Robin	1,922	5,019	32	10	1,535	8,250	4,808	409	2,700
Hermit Thrush	15	11	2	10	2	2	2	13	6
Eastern Bluebird	9	48	39	3	3	27	19	76	23
Gnatcatchers and Kinglets									
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	-	-	-	-	2	-	49	-	3
Golden-crowned Kinglet	49	168	16	6	11	2	4	-	-
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	35	141	7	15	26	30	77	45	33
Pipits									
Water Pipit	25	*	-	120	1	1	-	1	2
Waxwings									
Cedar Waxwing	273	1,772	344	55	287	80	96	146	4
Shrikes									
Loggerhead Shrike	26	18	8	7	6	12	17	59	5
Starlings									
Common Starling	180,353	2,300	963	1	500	178	61	12	121
Vireos									
White-eyed Vireo	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	6
Solitary Vireo	-	1	-	-	4	1	4	4	1
Wood Warblers									
Black-and-White Warbler	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Orange-crowned Warbler	-	-	-	-	5	15	6	1	-
Parula Warbler	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Myrtle Warbler	36	47	-	60	1,757	2,170	779	136	1,400
Yellow-throated Warbler	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2
Pine Warbler	-	60	1	2	22	7	80	22	46
Palm Warbler	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	8
Common Yellowthroat	-	3	-	2	1	2	3	1	13
Yellow-breasted Chat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Weaver Finches									
House Sparrow	389	889	55	2	350	150	106	49	286
Blackbirds									
Eastern Meadowlark	253	241	209	76	17	45	66	133	55
Red-winged Blackbird	27,400	945	7,690	5,235	2,784	1,980	136	955	112
Baltimore Oriole	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rusty Blackbird	58	444	72	-	15	-	-	-	-
Brewer's Blackbird	2	-	-	-	12	25	-	-	-
Boat-tailed Grackle	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	-
Common Grackle	31,617	4,263	16,225	-	295	595	64	1	2,200
Brown-headed Cowbird	5,337	830	1,007	-	60	48	2	-	37
Finches and Sparrows									
Cardinal	235	476	62	6	68	44	44	194	162
Dickcissel	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Evening Grosbeak	-	59	122	-	-	-	-	-	-
Purple Finch	73	454	8	20	13	12	-	7	2
House Finch	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pine Siskin	-	20	-	-	3	1	3	-	-
Am. Goldfinch	136	378	222	27	75	126	94	95	63
Rufous-sided Towhee	149	274	26	24	25	28	54	40	104
Savannah Sparrow	7	47	2	31	93	130	30	2	2
Grasshopper Sparrow	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Henslow's Sparrow	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Sharp-tailed Sparrow	-	-	-	-	2	10	-	-	4
Seaside Sparrow	-	-	-	-	9	-	-	-	-
Vesper Sparrow	-	11	-	20	40	2	6	96	5
Bachman's Sparrow	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-
Slate-colored Junco	113	819	33	-	5	2	-	47	2
Oregon Junco (mearns race)	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chipping Sparrow	7	50	-	180	3	14	27	681	27
Field Sparrow	149	299	111	131	9	2	18	40	14
White-crowned Sparrow	6	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White-throated Sparrow	1,184	1,407	51	43	215	62	283	170	144
Fox Sparrow	31	63	1	-	2	1	-	-	1
Lincoln's Sparrow	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Swamp Sparrow	155	177	24	14	33	34	59	29	44
Song Sparrow	86	359	19	46	6	9	17	11	21
Total Individuals (b)	363,746	26,324	28,265	8,105	19,480	19,714	11,263	8,916	15,360
Total Species on count	91	87	65	80	136	134	101	78	126
Total Species within count period	94	89	65	80	140	134	108	80	128

Notes:

(a) Up to three Whistling Swans at Wheeler Refuge in month of December.
 (b) Total individuals include the following, unidentified as to species: Wheeler Refuge--32,534 ducks reported from aerial survey, and one buteo hawk; Birmingham--one owl; Marianna--5 scaup, and 20 crows; and Bay County--912 scaup, 2 swallows, and 35 crows.

For full descriptions of the count areas, see American Birds or, for the Alabama counts, Volumes 17 and 18, No. 1 of Alabama Birdlife. Details reported for the counts (all taken in circles of 15-mile diameter except where indicated) and participants (names of party leaders underscored where reported) were as follows:

Wheeler Wildlife Refuge: Dec. 18; 6:30 AM to 5:30 PM (plus additional night hours). Clear; 18° to 40°; wind NW, 5-15 mph, gusty, cold front passed through. 40 observers in 6-8 parties; 68 party-hours (38 on foot, 27 by car, 1 by airplane, 2 by boat); 450 party-miles (16 on foot, 354 by car, 70 by airplane, 10 by boat). Habitat mainly sloughs managed for waterfowl, Tenn. River, fields and pastures. Substantiating field marks reported for Lesser Yellowlegs (including two-noted calls--MW,HHW), House Wren (in honeysuckle and brush at 30' in bright sun--MLB,BGM), Brewer's Blackbirds (RRR,FBT,HJ) and Whistling Swans. Participants: Thomas Z. Atkeson, Jr. (refuge manager), J. Russell Bailey, Jr., Andrew K. Bates, Raymond D. Bates, Richard Bays, Michael L. Bierly (compiler), J. Homer Blackwood, Jack N. Caruso, Steve Caruso, Lynn P. Childers, Helen and Lloyd W. Clayton, John A. Dougherty, W. Cecil Davis, Carolyn Garrett, Henry H. Grammer, John F. Harsh, Roger O. Harshaw, Harold Johnson, Helen H. Kittinger, Ronald D. Kittinger, John R. Lester, Renee and Robin McDonald, Bobby G. Meadows, Ann L. Miller, Charles and Mike Owsley, John Padgett, Elberta G. Reid, Robert R. Reid, Jr., F. Bob Truett, Pat and Paul van Rossen, Thomas P. Sandlin, Emmett N. Waldrep, George Williams, Jr., Morris Williams, Harriett H. Wright, and Joe Wright.

Birmingham: Jan. 2; 6:00 AM to 5:30 PM (plus additional night hours). Cloudy after rain, mostly before dawn, and cooling; 45° to 58°; wind NW, variable avg. 5.5 mph; 2nd warmest Dec. on record. 47 observers in 13 parties; 115 party-hours (98 on foot, 17 by car); 407 party-miles (55 on foot, 352 by car). Habitat mainly oak-pine woods, lakes, rivers and ponds, and residential. Substantiating field marks reported for Rough-legged Hawk (including hovering flight--GBC,0CC), Solitary Vireo (EGR), House Finch (TAI), Oregon Junco (TAI,JMI), Lincoln's Sparrow (TAI,JMI) and others. Participants: Gussie Arnett, J. Russell Bailey, Jr., Naomi G. Banks, Raymond D. Bates, Robert E. Burks, Jr., G. Bradley Carlisle, Gregory C. Carlisle, Frederick T. Carney, Dale J. Carruthers, Walter F. Coxe, Bruce Crider, John F. Harsh, Carole Hocutt, Dan C. Holliman, Ruth R. Horsley, Donald J. and Billie Sue Hulsey, John M. Imhof, Thomas A. Imhof (compiler), Greg Jackson, Helen H. Kittinger, Ronald D. Kittinger, Christine Leake, Donnie Lee, John R. Lester, Ronald W. and Becky Lewis, Wilma J. Lindberg, Roger Maner, Ann L. Miller, James V. Peavy, Jr., Lee N. Peavy, Morton H. Perry, Olivia Pitman, Millard F. Prather, Elberta G. Reid, Robert R. Reid, Jr., James W. Shepherd, Idalene F. Sneed, Helen B. and Percy L. Thigpen, Virginia R. Thrasher, F. Bob Truett, Marietta Truett, Arthur and Becky Tyson, and Harriett H. Wright.

Jacksonville: Dec. 23; 6:30 AM to 3:00 PM. Clear; 39° to 50°; wind ENE, 14 mph. 6 observers in 3 parties; 21 party-hours (17 on foot, 5 by car); 113 party-miles (14 on foot, 99 by car). Habitat 75% woodland edges. Participants: Richard E. Ambrose (compiler), William J. Calvert, Jr., Jerry A. Clonts, John Hall, Lin Jennings, and C. William Summerour.

Eufula Wildlife Refuge: Jan. 8. Clear; 35° to 45°; wind NE, 5 mph. 12 observers in 3 parties; 21 party-hours; 26 party-miles (3 on foot, 23 by car). Habitat includes cropland, woods, marsh or swampland, and Chattahoochee River; count conducted on refuge area. Participants: Julian E. Dusi (compiler), Rosemary T. Dusi, Ted Ellis, Florence Lynn, William Matheny, Ron McKittrick, Harriett and Tom Meadows, Fred Milton, Frank Peterson, Robert Terhune, and Barry Witte.

Mobile: Dec. 31; 6:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Cloudy AM, clear PM; 65° to 71°; wind N to NE, 8-18 mph. 13 observers in 7 parties; 52 party-hours (23 on foot, 29 by car); 306 party-miles (19 on foot, 287 by car). Habitat includes Mobile Bay, rivers and ponds, marshlands and beaches, upland mixed woods, fields and pastures, and residential. Substantiating field marks reported for Yellow-crowned Night Heron (REH,JLD,MWG et al) and Dickcissel (JLD,LD,WD). Participants: Fred E. Bowers, Clara L. Caffey, Leo and William Denton, Fr. J. Lambert Dorn, M. Wilson Gaillard, Richard E. Hayward, Jr. (compiler), Elin Kincaid, Louise N. McKinstry, Margaret E. Miller, Genevieve and James R. Spafford, and William Tonsmeire.

Dauphin Island-Bellingrath Gardens: Dec. 18; 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Clear; 36° to 65°; wind N, 10-20 mph. 17 observers in 8 parties; 70 party-hours (23 on foot, 47 by car); 532 party-miles (32 on foot, 500 by car). Habitat includes mixed and pine woods salt and brackish water, mudflats, and marshes. Substantiating field marks reported for Yellow-crowned Night Herons (MWG,REH,MFW). Participants: Fred E. Bowers, Leo and William Denton, Fr. J. Lambert Dorn, M. Wilson Gaillard (compiler), Richard E. Hayward, Jr., Elin Kincaid, Charles, James and Mary Wayhews, Max P. McGill, Louise N. McKinstry, Margaret E. Miller, Genevieve and James R. Spafford, Elizabeth R. Toenes, and William Tonsmeire.

Pensacola: Dec. 18; 6:30 AM to 6:00 PM. Clear; 48° to 63°; wind SW to N, 15-24 mph. 27 observers in 8 parties; 75 party-hours (34 on foot, 41 by car); 359 party-miles (28 on foot, 331 by car). Habitat includes Pensacola Bay and shoreline, deciduous and pine woods, pastures and edges, city and suburbs, marshes, and beach. Substantiating field marks reported for Yellow-crowned Night Herons (APW,FB), Peregrine Falcon (observed perched, in flight and while making a stoop--LEH,FPB,EB,AK) and Barn Swallow (DHT,SG,AS), all under good light conditions. Participants: Katharine T. Beck, Cheryl Belitsky, Elaine Bidstrup, Frank Bray, Bob and Lucy Duncan, Amy, Ted and Vance Furnans, Sherlie Gade, Agnes H. and Harold E. Gaither, Goldwyn Gary, Lyman E. Goodnight, Florence P. and Leroy E. Healy, Charles J. Kahn, Albert Keyser, Curtis L. Kingsbery (compiler), Marjorie McWair, Cosette Poliso, Paul Ramirez, Charles W. Saunders, Alan Sheppard, David H. Turpin, Fred Wernicke, and A. F. Wicke, Jr.

Marianna: Dec. 18; 6:00 AM to 8:30 PM. Cloudy AM, clear PM; 48° to 50° (30° drop in temp. over previous 12 hrs); wind NE, 15 mph; very dry. 13 observers in 6 parties (plus 1 at feeder); 35 party-hours (8 on foot, 23 by car, 4 by boat); 159 party-miles (9 on foot, 146 by car, 4 by boat). Habitat includes pine woods, scrub oaks, fields and pastures, lakes, and cypress swamps. Substantiating field marks reported for Swallow-tailed Kite (in swamp near Chipola River—GT,DT) and immature Broad-winged Hawks (directly above, 500-600' soaring over mill pond—SJS,RA,JIG). Participants: Richmond Anderson, Lillian Cook, Jeff I. Gray, Marion W. Gray (compiler), Mary Gray, Elizabeth and William A. Hearn, Nancy and Wilbur Roberts, Donald and Frances Scott, Stephen J. Stedman, and David and Gladys Todd.

Bay County: Dec. 31; 5:00 AM to 5:30 PM. Rainy AM, clear PM; 66° to 74°; wind W, 0-5 mph; season unusually warm. 23 observers in 10 parties; 75 party-hours (26 on foot, 40 by car, 9 by boat); 328 party-miles (22 on foot, 246 by car, 60 by boat). Habitat mainly open water, pine woods, swamps and marshes, and towns. Substantiating field marks reported for Sandwich Tern (including yellow tip on black bill—SJS,RA) and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (GT,EC). Participants: Richmond Anderson, Edna Collins, Jim Dodds, Betty Friedman, Marion W. and Mary Gray, Roy Hallman, Fred Jones, Lib Knight, Vicki Milam, Mary Ann and Terri Olson, Audrey Parker, Nancy and Wilbur Roberts, Louis Robertson, Donald Scott (compiler), Frances Scott, Stephen J. Stedman, David and Gladys Todd, and Anna and Tom Watson.

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RUFF AND HOUSE WREN RECORDS

Julian L. Dusi

On 10 Aug 1971, an unusual-appearing shorebird was seen on the mudflats of Houston Bottoms, Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge. The bird was observed carefully for several minutes at about 100 feet and then two color photographs were taken using a 600 mm telephoto lens. The bird could not be identified as anything but a Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax*. Later, when R. T. Peterson was in Columbus, Georgia, 30 Sept, he and Earle Greene, of 600 Club fame, confirmed the identification from the color transparencies. (Ed. note: A Ruff, present in Atlanta for about 2 weeks, disappeared on 31 Jul during heavy rains.)

This report of three nesting attempts of a House Wren, *Troglodytes aedon* is from Steve H. Adams, a zoology graduate student. The wrens nested under the cover of the L.P. gas tank by his mobile home in Auburn. Nesting started in late May with eggs noted the first week end in June. None had hatched by 27 June. Some eggs were removed, but 3 were left in the nest. The second nesting attempt started by 4 Jul and by 10 Jul, 10 eggs were present. None had hatched by 31 Jul. All eggs but 1 were removed. The third nesting started in early Aug and 5 eggs were added to the nest. None hatched by the second week in Sept when the nest was removed and the tank filled with gas.

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