



MARION, ALABAMA

Part II. Lakeland Farm

This is one of a series of articles on good locations for observing birdlife in the AOS area. Marion is the county seat of Perry County in the Upper Coastal Plain of Alabama, approximately 75 miles from both Birmingham and Montgomery and 55 miles from Tuscaloosa. Part I on the Marion area, which covered the Fish Hatchery and Perry Lake northeast of the city, appeared in Vol. 20, Nos. 3-4 (1972). A previous article on the Birmingham Zoo was contained in Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2 (1972) (see also the article on Dauphin Island in American Birds, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1971)).

Lakeland Farm, situated in the prairie region of Alabama south of the city, is a dairy farm with a number of fishing lakes. Its front entrance may be reached by following signs from Ala. Route 5, beginning approximately one mile south of the College Inn. Be careful not to miss the 90 degree turn to the left (west) 3/10 mile from Route 5; the entrance is 2 miles west of that junction. The back entrance, which is off Ala. Route 183 approximately 2-1/2 miles west of its junction with Ala. Route 5 south of the city, is reached by traveling north from Route 183 on a dirt road 1/2 mile along some hedgerows. Because the better lakes are near the back entrance at the south end of the farm and because White-crowned Sparrows are often found in winter and early spring in the hedgerows along that approach, the back entrance is often the most preferable route.

The principal attractions of Lakeland Farm are shorebirds, waterfowl and birds of the winter fields. Details regarding those and other species follow:

Shorebirds--The quality of shorebird migration at Lakeland Farm is very dependent upon the weather and is best during wet springs. The major attractions are the Am. Golden Plover and Upland Sandpiper (formerly known as Upland Plover), which have been sighted at both the north and south ends of the farm. When they pass through Alabama, the Golden Plovers will still be in their winter plumage and, thus, have to be searched for with care in the fields, which also are inhabited by the Killdeer that is approximately the same size. Largest numbers recorded in recent years were 80 Upland Sandpipers in Mar. '65 and 75 Golden Plovers in Mar. '70. In addition, during the wet spring of 1965, one of the few spring records of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Alabama occurred at the farm. Other shorebirds that may be found are both Yellowlegs and Pectoral and Least Sandpipers; the Greater Yellowlegs has been seen as early as February, thus indicating wintering in the area. Of further interest was a Northern Phalarope spinning on one of the ponds in Oct. '54.

Water and Marsh Birds--The best seasons for observing these species are winter and spring; and, although waterfowl have experienced a recent reduction in numbers, a good variety of birds can usually be seen, mostly on the lakes at the south end of the farm. As might be expected, the species with the largest number is the Am. Coot, followed by the Am. Wigeon (or Baldpate), Ring-necked Duck, Shoveler, Pied-billed Grebe, and during the spring, Blue-winged Teal. In recent years, a small group of Ruddy Ducks has consistently appeared on the lakes in the central portion of the farm. Following these in number are Mallard, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal and Lesser Scaup. Uncommon but found during some seasons are the Redhead, Bufflehead, and Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers as well as both blue and white phases of the Snow Goose (early observations for them having occurred in Feb. '71). Some of the lakes and ponds are occasionally drained in the winter and then become good habitat for shorebirds.

Lakeland Farm is probably one of the better places north of the Gulf Coast to try to find the King Rail, although it still is located less than one-half the times the farm is visited. When found, it is usually in the very wet area near the dam between the two lakes at the southwest end of the farm. Other marsh birds seen on occasions in the spring include the Virginia Rail, Sora and Short-billed Marsh Wren in the same area.

Wading Birds--As might be expected, the number of lakes and ponds attracts a good selection of wading birds, including the Great and Little Blue Herons and Am. (or Great) Egret. Rarer are the Snowy Egret (which was seen for an early Upper Coastal Plain record in early April, '70), the Least Bittern (found in Apr. '71), and sometimes the White Ibis. Large flocks of the primarily insect-eating Cattle Egret, obviously attracted by the large pasture area, have been seen in late summer up to an estimated 450-500 birds.

Winter Field Birds--Birds of our winter fields are usually rather prevalent in the pastures, especially the Savannah and Vesper Sparrows and Water Pipit, the number of Savannahs and Pipits often approximating 300 or more. Small groups of Horned Larks may also be found; and in some years, apparently only when the winter is harsh farther north, large numbers appear, such as around 250 in Feb. '69 and 350 in Dec. '57. In addition, an occasional Lapland Longspur has been seen, usually in the flocks of larks; but likewise when there are harsh winters, larger numbers may occur, one instance being 80 in Jan. '57, and a Smith's Longspur was seen in a flock of Laplands in Dec. '57.

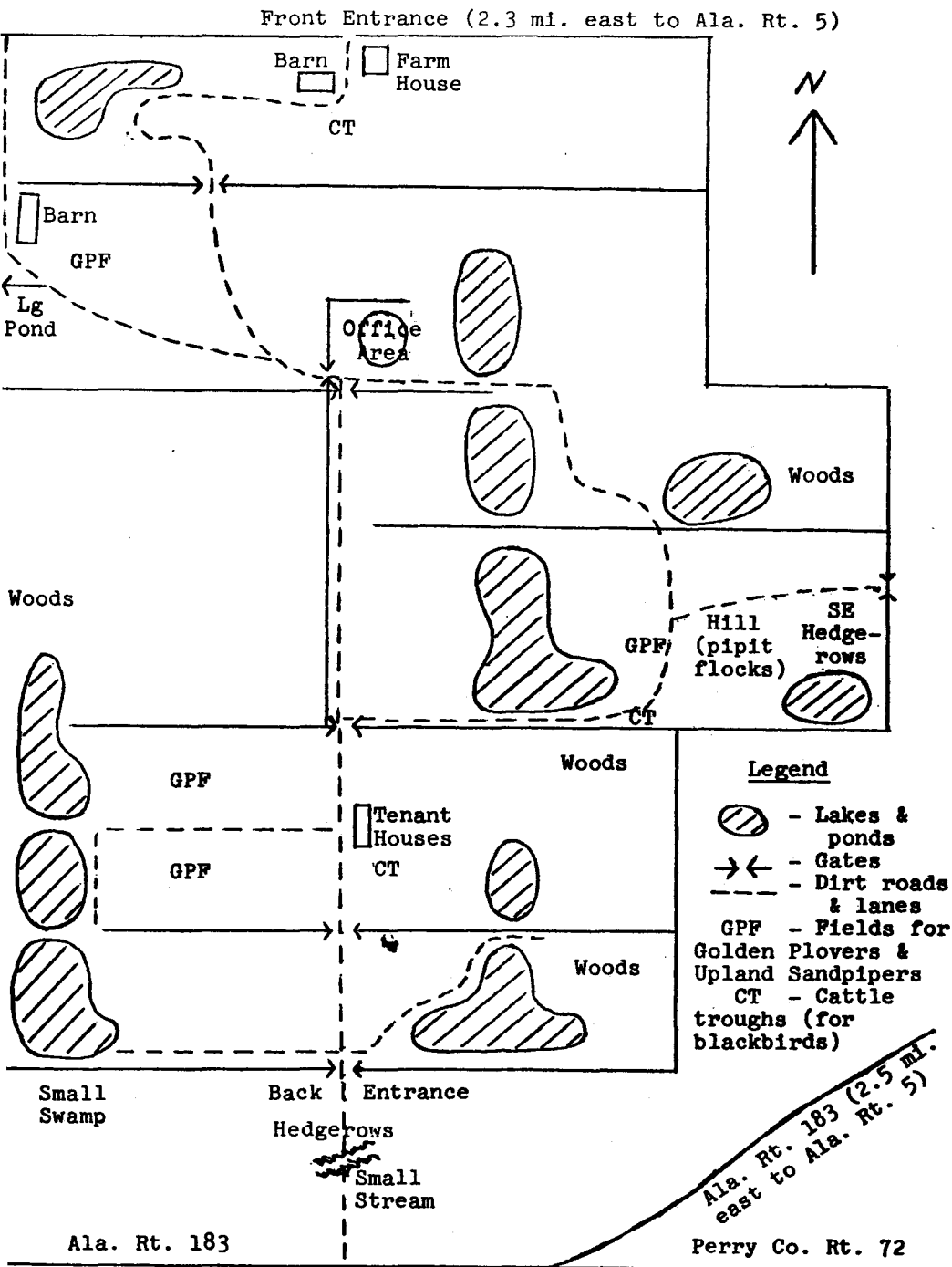
Western Visitors--Since Lakeland Farm is in the prairie region of Alabama, it attracts birds of the Western Plains that spread out in winter across the South. The most numerous species in this category is the Brewer's Blackbird, which is present into the hundreds as late as early April. The easiest places to find them are around the cattle troughs where they will be feeding with other blackbirds including Rustys. Western Meadowlarks have also been recorded on occasions; and a male Yellow-headed Blackbird was seen in Sept. '72 for the second and earliest Alabama inland record.

Birds of Prey--The pasture habitat is also attractive, especially in winter, to Red-tailed and Marsh Hawks and Am. Kestrels. A Rough-legged Hawk was noted in Dec. '73, as was a Short-eared Owl found dead the same month in the general area. Black Vultures, presumably coming from the roost near the Marion Fish Hatchery, are often found in large flocks of over 80 or 100.

Swallows--The number of lakes and ponds at the farm attracts large flocks of migrating swallows, especially in the early fall and also during some springs. These include particularly the Barn, Tree and Rough-winged Swallows, which are usually accompanied by Purple Martins and a few Bank and Cliff Swallows.

Other Passerines--The main sparrow attraction not previously mentioned is the White-crowned, which can be found in winter and early spring in the hedgerows along the back entrance to the farm and in the southeastern field borders. They have also been noted below the dam of the northwesternmost pond near the front entrance at the north of the farm. Other sparrows to be expected are the Swamp and Song, and in spring Myrtle Warblers are abundant.

One of the best places in Alabama to find Dickcissels is south of the farm along Route 183 as it curves southwest toward Uniontown. The best time of the year is in May and June when the birds will be found singing on fences and bushes bordering grain fields along the highway. Some Fish Crows may also be seen at the farm, doubtless coming from the group more often found around Perry Lake, which makes the Marion area one of the closest places that this primarily coastal species comes to the Mountain Region.



**Mammals**--One of the principal attractions of Lakeland Farm is the large number of Muskrats, which can usually be found swimming about in the various lakes. In addition, the farm is probably one of the best places to find the Cotton Rat although, as with most rodents, their secretive habits make them difficult to locate.

There are some picnic shelters still located at the farm and an office area one mile south of the front entrance where permits for fishing may be obtained. The College Inn on Ala. Route 5 has restaurant and overnight accommodations; and a good restaurant at the intersection of Ala. Routes 5 and 14 is the Steak House, there also being a Dairy Queen located at that intersection.

Robert R. Reid  
2616 Mountain Brook Parkway  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

LIBRARY ANNOUNCEMENT

With the unfortunate passing of Clustie McTyeire, the Society is left without a Librarian. This notice is a call for volunteers to serve on a Library Committee formed to carry on these very important duties and, it is hoped, to assume an expanded role in service to our organization. Membership on the committee will be limited to six and will be chosen from among the volunteers so as to give broad regional representation. A chairperson, to be officially titled Librarian, will be selected on recommendation by this committee to take executive responsibility for committee action.

The primary responsibility of the committee involves the fate of back issues of Alabama Birdlife. Auburn University Library is the repository for uncirculated copies of our publication and is authorized to disperse these for the purpose of enhancing its own ornithological collection via exchange with other libraries. The committee is requested to review these procedures to insure that they are consonant with the aims of our organization. The committee is also requested to assess the feasibility of installing collections of past volumes of Alabama Birdlife in the libraries of other of the major colleges and universities in Alabama and northwesternmost Florida. Alabama Birdlife is the publication of record for our area, and the editors are making commendatory efforts to improve its scope and format. It is imperative that we now reevaluate our dispersal procedures.

The responsibilities of this committee should prove a rewarding challenge for those interested in fostering the aims of the Society. The committee is encouraged to broaden the scope of its concerns and should expect to receive the fullest cooperation of the Society's administration. Those interested are encouraged to contact Howard Einspahr as soon as possible.

Howard N. Einspahr  
1500 33rd Street South  
Birmingham 35205

BANDER'S CORNER

James V. Peavy, Jr.

One of the great rewards of being a bird bander is the opportunity to be out of doors in wild and sometimes lonely places for an entire day. When you have bird nets up, you are forced to remain nearby, and as a result, you can become very familiar with an area. These conditions lend to experiences that do not always relate to birds, but which are interesting and enjoyable encounters with other forms of wildlife. Following are a few experiences I have had while banding.

Spring, 1973 - Ted Weems and I had been banding for eight days on the Gulf Coast. One of our favorite places is St. Andrew's Bay, near the abandoned town of Navy Cove. Nearby we found a pond with a brood of baby alligators, watched over by a very protective mother. One day a Pied-billed Grebe stopped on the pond to rest and feed. Soon the mother alligator was stalking the grebe. She swam slowly toward the bird, showing nothing but her eyes and nostrils, until only ten yards of water separated the two. Without a ripple, the alligator sank out of sight. Both Ted and I expected to see the grebe disappear in a sudden splash of snapping jaws, but that grebe must have seen alligators before. As soon as the gator was submerged, the grebe also sank; for a few long seconds, the pond was calm, ruffled only by a slight breeze. Soon the alligator reappeared, and so did the grebe; they had changed places! This same performance occurred again and again during the day. The next morning the grebe was gone - eaten? I'll bet not.

Fall, 1973 - Ted and I were again at St. Andrew's Bay. As usual we were camping out, sleeping in my V-W van; suddenly there were footsteps outside. Not just one or two, but an army marching by, and I ask, "Ted, do you hear that?"... Silly question...even Weems couldn't sleep through that racket. So we investigate - nothing. As soon as we turn on the light, open the door and look around, all is quiet; as soon as we settle down again, the army is on the move. Finally we sat outside, quietly waiting. Soon our visitor was identified - an armadillo, and only one at that.

For banders there is a special thrill in getting to band a new species; the opportunity to hold, examine, measure and record data on a new bird is one of the high points in a bander's day. For most birders, some species are especially interesting and exciting; for example, waterfowl, warblers and birds of prey. You can imagine what a thrill it must have been for Margaret Miller this fall when she caught and banded a Sharp-shinned Hawk, a new species for her and one of the really exciting birds to handle.

When a bird wearing a band is recovered, the person who banded the bird receives a computer card with number-coded information. These numbers are translated with the aid of the bird banding manual, and sometimes an interesting story unfolds. One such card arrived this fall, and it stated 44-22-04-01-300-01-4, among other things. These numbers told me that this bird, a male Brown-headed Cowbird, was captured by a state employee working on the Cowbird Control Program in the very heart of the Kirtland's Warbler breeding range. This Cowbird was banded in the Birmingham Zoo on January 26, 1974, and was trapped near Luzerne, Michigan, on June 1 of the same year. For those not familiar with the Kirtland's Warbler story, a little background information follows.

The Kirtland's Warbler is one of the rarest songbirds in the United States. It has a very restricted breeding range and a highly specialized nesting

habitat requirement, nesting only in young jack-pines in a few counties of North Central Michigan. For some reason the Brown-headed Cowbird, which is a brood-parasite, seeks out the Kirtland's nest in which to lay its eggs. The developing Cowbird usually gets so much of the available food that the warbler young do not survive. Although Cowbirds lay eggs in the nests of other species, the Kirtland's nests are among the most heavily parasitized. The species is already in trouble due to low numbers, so every nest is important to its ultimate survival. Local authorities began a control program several years ago in which large numbers of Cowbirds are trapped and killed. This program is apparently working, because fewer Kirtland's nests seem to be parasitized since the program began. We become involved with this species, because the very Cowbirds which visit our fields and feeders all winter may be one of the parties involved in a life-and-death struggle for the survival of an entire species.

5205 Beacon Drive  
Birmingham 35210

BIRMINGHAM TOWER CASUALTIES

Fall, 1974

Richard J. Remy, Jr.

Fall collections were made of bird casualties at WAPI and WBRG television towers in Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama. The location and structure of the towers are described in Alabama Birdlife 16:4 (34) and 17:2 (46).

During the collection period which began on September 9 and ended on November 10, daily trips were made to the towers between sunrise and 8:30 a.m. During this period, 29 individuals of 14 species were collected. The following table shows the number of specimens collected at each tower and the dates of collection.

It may be of interest to note that the majority of the casualties were recovered after overcast, rainy nights with northeasterly winds.

To my knowledge, the only systematic tower kill surveys in Birmingham were performed by Michael Lee Bierly in 1967 and 1968. It is my intention to reinstate regular, systematic surveys of tower casualties during the fall and spring migration periods for the purpose of collecting data for records of migration movements, academic study of specimens and other related endeavors.

The specimens will be donated to approved museums and universities for use as study skins.

Special thanks to James V. Peavy, Jr., for his help in conducting this survey.

602 South 38th Street  
Birmingham 35222

Greg D. Jackson

		<u>Total at Each Tower</u>	
		<u>WAPI</u>	<u>WBRC</u>
9/9	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Swainson's Thrush		
9/15	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Eastern Phoebe, Black-burnian Warbler		
9/16	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: American Redstart		
9/19	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Swainson's Thrush		
9/20	- WBRC: Red-eyed Vireo WAPI: 0		
9/24	- WBRC: Yellow-breasted Chat WAPI: 0		
9/25	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Red-eyed Vireo*, Yellow-breasted Chat		
9/26	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Gray Catbird, Wood Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, 2 Red-eyed Vireos, Yellow-breasted Chat, Rose-breasted Grosbeak		
9/29	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Swainson's Thrush		
10/2	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Red-eyed Vireo		
10/8	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Gray Catbird		
10/16	- WBRC: American Coot, 3 Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak WAPI: Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Pine Warbler		
10/30	- WBRC: 0 WAPI: Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet		
		American Coot	0
		Yellow-billed Cuckoo	2
		Eastern Phoebe	1
		Gray Catbird	2
		Wood Thrush	1
		Hermit Thrush	1
		Swainson's Thrush	4
		Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1
		Red-eyed Vireo	4
		Blackburnian Warbler	1
		Pine Warbler	1
		Yellow-breasted Chat	2
		American Redstart	1
		Rose-breasted Grosbeak	1
			22
			7
		Combined Total: 29	

\*This bird was found stunned and was unable to fly. Both its vision and coordination had been impaired by its apparent collision with a tower support cable. It was taken to the Birmingham Zoo where it proved to be a cooperative patient for five days. By then, it had sufficiently recovered and was released.

In the gloomy pre-dawn hours of November 10, 1974, one could see a sinister-looking caravan moving swiftly north on the Dauphin Island Causeway. The destination of the vehicles was the still-slumbering town of Bayou La Batre, Alabama. Even though the occupants of these cars were not hostile, they were heavily armed - with boxes of Dramamine, heavy coats, well-used binoculars and field guides. This was the day that 21 hardy and enthusiastic birders braved the waters of the Gulf of Mexico in search of pelagic birds. These courageous souls were: Dick and Judy Crittenden, Temple Douglas, Howard Einspahr, Reid Freeman, Billie Sue and Donald Hulsey, Tom Imhof, Greg Jackson, Helen Kittinger, Roger Naner, Ann Miller, David Patick, James and Lee Peavy, Bob and Elberta Reid, Percy Thigpen, Arthur and Becky Tyson and Harriett Wright.

At 6:00 a.m. the party boarded their vessel, the R.V. Aquarius. The boat was the property of the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium, and the able man at the helm was Capt. Barton Kern. The Aquarius headed down the bayou under clear and sunny skies. The temperature that day ranged from 40°F early in the morning to 60°F in the afternoon, and the wind was from the southeast at 10 to 20 knots. Some of the birds observed during the 10-minute journey down the bayou included: Great Blue Heron, Cattle Egret, Louisiana Heron, Wood Duck, Clapper Rail, Belted Kingfisher, Common Flicker, Fish Crow, Carolina Wren, Starling, House Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, Savannah Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow.

As the group traversed the placid waters of Mississippi Sound, all eyes were trained upon the sea. Although coastal species were common, there were no pelagics to be seen. But, something that was seen (and especially felt) was the increase in size of the swells in the gulf as the boat passed the west end of Dauphin Island. Though the swells were not especially large (about five feet), they were rough enough to force most of the shrimp boats to work in the sound. The boat continued southeast until eventually it was 14 miles from shore. After many hours without sighting any pelagic species, the attitudes of some observers were getting more and more pessimistic, but they stayed alert (at least usually).

One of the reasons for this slight deterioration in attitude was that always-faithful companion of novice seagoers - seasickness. The gulf was not the only thing green that day. Trips to the rail (for purposes not directly affiliated with watching birds) were about as frequent as the sightings of Laughing Gulls and were equally difficult to estimate. About half of the people were ill at some time, and many of the other half came close. Remarks such as: "I wish they'd pull off to the side for just a minute or two so we could stop moving;" and "I don't know if I could look up for a flock of Whooping Cranes," were prevalent among certain passengers. It became increasingly difficult for some birders to look for pelagic birds while lying and kneeling near the rail and staring blankly into the sea. There was, however, a general consensus among the non- or partially-affected birders that the other passengers did not miss much while they were sick, for no unusual birds were sighted on the open sea.

The Aquarius traveled south of Sand Island (which was inundated) and then headed into Mobile Bay between Fort Gaines and Fort Morgan. At this point, a miracle happened - the great swells turned into ripples. This life-saving condition almost immediately picked up the spirits of the formerly seasick passengers. Though the seasickness problem was solved, one pressing problem remained - there were still

no sightings of unusual birds. The boat headed west from Mobile Bay, under the Dauphin Island Causeway, and back into the Mississippi Sound. When the vessel started going west, the passengers began chumming the water with bread and suet in hopes of attracting a flock of gulls, and with them possibly a hungry jaeger. A large flock of gulls (mostly Laughing Gulls) was quickly attracted and provided a good opportunity for plumage study. Some trip members became quite adept at throwing pieces of bread so that the adult (and a few wise immature) Laughing Gulls would catch them in flight.

Although there was still much hope of seeing a rare or unusual bird, this hope was diminishing little by little. It was getting to the point where a Ring-billed Gull aroused great interest. Finally, however, the magic word was said - "Jaeger!" Tom Imhof was perched on the upper deck and spotted a lone jaeger in a distant flock of gulls toward the stern. The bird disappeared before anyone else could spot it, but the sighting quickly alerted all on board. Another jaeger (or possibly the original) appeared at the stern and then flew closer and off to port providing excellent views. Its appearance was followed by several other jaegers, and the boat was chasing all over the Sound in pursuit of the birds. The first birds seen were Pomarine Jaegers, and later some Parasitic Jaegers were observed. All of the individuals seen were light-phased. The jaegers were primarily identified on the basis of direct size comparisons with the many gulls which they were harassing. The Pominarines were noticeably larger than either the Laughing or Ring-billed Gulls, and the Parasitics were either smaller than or equal in size to the Laughing Gulls. After the birds were seen to everyone's satisfaction, the Aquarius headed toward Bayou La Batre and arrived about 4:00 p.m. The species seen on that day at sea are as follows: Common Loon, 25; Horned Grebe, 15; Double-crested Cormorant, 150+; Magnificent Frigatebird, 2; Lesser Scaup, 15; Bufflehead, 1; Surf Scoters?, 3; Red-breasted Merganser, 15; American Coot, 1; Pomarine Jaeger, 2; Parasitic Jaeger, 3; Jaeger sp., 1; Herring Gull, 200; Ring-billed Gull, 250; Laughing Gull, 3000; Forster's Tern, 100; Common Tern, 2; Royal Tern, 75.

#### A.O.S. FALL MEETING

The A.O.S. returned to Dauphin Island this year for its fall meeting October 11-13. The large attendance, including some 60 registrants, enjoyed a weekend of warm, clear weather and excellent birding. The Friday night program featured a slide presentation by Howard Einspahr on his recent trip to Arizona. The banquet Saturday night was a seafood buffet presented at St. Edmond's-by-the-Sea Catholic Church. The capacity crowd was treated to some unusual comments on field identification of birds by Bob Reid, in addition to Jim Keeler's slide presentation which described several Department of Conservation activities. These include Woodcock and heron banding programs and a hawk survey in the coastal plain region of Alabama.

Although the fine weather did not produce a good warbler flight, any disappointment on this account was relieved by the presence on the island of several "all-star" species that were well-seen by many of the participants. These included Reddish Egret, Peregrine and Merlin Falcons, Western Kingbird, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and a deceased Noddy Tern, a victim of Hurricane Carmen, that had been carefully preserved in Lib Toenes' freezer. The occurrence of the white morph of the Great Blue Heron, formerly the Great White Heron, produced added excitement for many. Other notables were Magnificent Frigatebird, American Oystercatcher, Knot, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Sharp-tailed and Seaside Sparrows. The eighteen species of warblers that were observed included Black-throated Green and Wilson's. The banding station at the Pigpen, tended by Margaret Miller and Buzz Peavy, added Least Flycatcher and Philadelphia Vireo to a list of 139 species recorded during the meeting weekend.