

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 Pominines 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.