

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.

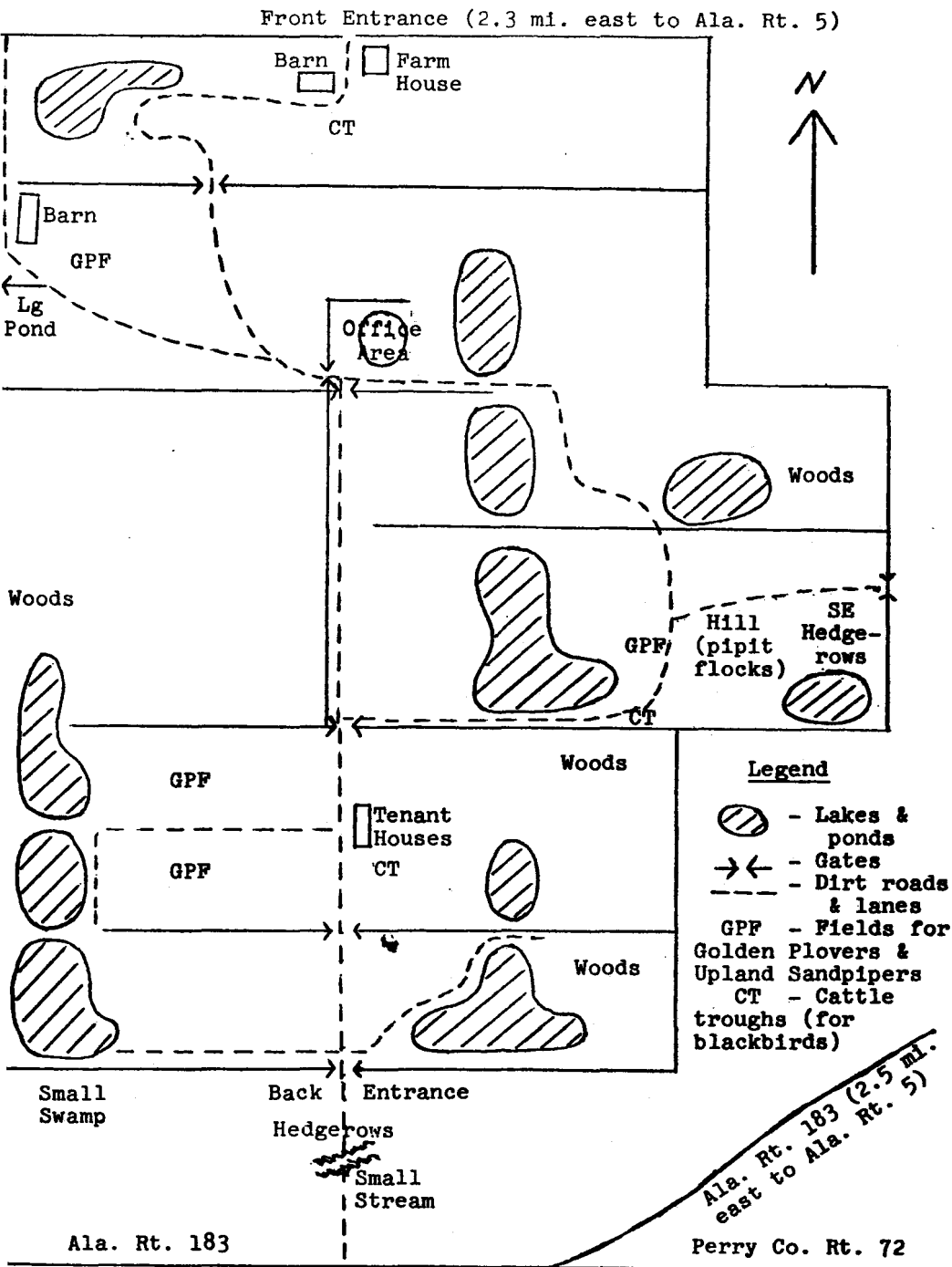
Western Visitors--Since Lakeland Farm is in the prairie region of Alabama, it attracts birds of the Western Plains that spread out in winter across the South. The most numerous species in this category is the Brewer's Blackbird, which is present into the hundreds as late as early April. The easiest places 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.

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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.

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