

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE



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WESTERN VISITORS AGAIN HIGHLIGHT
AOS CHRISTMAS COUNTS

Led by record-breaking counts at Gulf Shores and Bay County and welcoming reinstatement of the Tuscaloosa count after a lapse of several years, the thirteen 1975 AOS Christmas Counts produced numerous noteworthy records.

Western Visitors--Among the many exciting observations, the limelight was stolen by a little olive green and brown bird from the West--the second AOS area record of a Green-tailed Towhee, the first having been almost a decade earlier at Dauphin Island. The bird appeared in a brushy draw and responded to "squeaking" by Fairly Chandler, expert compiler of the Gulf Shores count; it was later seen by many at various times in January. Other outstanding western visitors included three Lark Sparrows at Fort Morgan (an abundant western sparrow for which there are few records in the AOS area) and a striking male Black-headed Grosbeak at Bay County (there having been seven prior records from Northwest Florida, four of which were in December). In addition, the Groove-billed Ani (observed at close range so the grooves could be seen) returned in November to the same dairy farm in Panama City where it was observed three years ago on the Bay County Christmas Count and was found in December on the count date. For previous history of those birds in Northwest Florida, see the article on the 1972 Christmas Counts in Alabama Birdlife (1973), 21(1-2):2. Further, two anis of species undetermined were found a mile or so outside the count circle of the Dauphin Island count. Difficulty in identification is encountered when grooves on the bill cannot be seen since immature anis of both species apparently do not have grooved bills. However, although all anis have ridged bills, the ridge of the Smooth-billed extends higher than the crown of the head whereas that of the Groove-billed is approximately even with the crown. Thus, if the birds do not give their distinguishing calls, the height of the ridge of the bill must often be the determinative field mark.

Northern Visitors--Perhaps of greater significance since constituting the first record for the AOS area--and certainly just as challenging--was the Arctic Loon at Birmingham. This species in its winter plumage might not stimulate as much interest, however, because it is so difficult to tell in that plumage from the same plumage of the small race of the Common Loon. However, much work by experienced field observers was directed toward the bird in question to substantiate its identity--see in this connection Imhof, Thomas A., "Arctic Loon, New Species for Alabama," Alabama Birdlife (1975), 23(3-4):16. Another noteworthy northern visitor to Birmingham was the third record for Alabama of the Common Brant, which appeared first on a lake in the Hoover suburb, moved to East Lake in mid-January and remained there until May; the cause of its disappearance then remains a mystery. Other significant observations of northern waterfowl were 3 female Black Scoters at Bay County, 2 Oldsquaws (a male at Tuscaloosa and a female at Pensacola), and a female Common (or Am.) Merganser observed closely at Eufaula Wildlife Refuge. It is interesting to note that although the Black Scoter has been seen infrequently in the AOS area, this is the third straight year it has been observed on or within the count periods of AOS Christmas Counts--two at Pensacola last year, and one at Bay County and one at Gulf Shores on the 1973 counts. Rounding out the list of notable winter visitors were a Parasitic Jaeger at Dauphin Island, its first Christmas Count record, and 4 Short-eared Owls at Eufaula Refuge.

Orioles--Pensacola again had both species of the Northern Oriole, as to which certain taxonomic opinion now favors reversing the "lumping" of the 1973 AOS Supplement and, thus, recognizing again the Baltimore and Bullock's Orioles as

separate species. See Pratt, H. Douglas, Birding (1975), VII(5):303,-07. Consequently, it is most desirable for all observers still to keep records of separate identification of the two birds. This year, Pensacola had two of each type, two male Bullock's on its count and a male and female Baltimore within the count week. Although a male and female, the Baltimores were seen in different locations. The male Baltimore was frequenting the same feeder where a similar male had been seen often the two preceding winters (including the Christmas Counts for those years), and it is interesting to note that one of the male Bullock's visited the same feeder and would often chase off its relative. A female Bullock's was seen at Magnolia Springs on the Gulf Shores count for its first Christmas Count record.

Summering Residents and Migrants--Leading the list of summering residents and migrants that remained on the coast was a Black Tern observed by several near Perdido Pass on the Gulf Shores count. This was a sequel to another winter observation from the same general area on February 5, 1973. A male Summer Tanager--presumably the same bird seen in the previous two Christmas Count periods--was present at the same suet feeder in Marianna, and 3 Dickcissels were counted at Fort Morgan. Also lingering in the AOS area were single Purple Gallinules at Gulf Shores and Bay County, a Rough-winged Swallow at Bay County, a Swainson's Thrush at Pensacola, a Yellow-breasted Chat at Mobile, and Indigo Buntings--a male and female at Pensacola, and a female as far north as Marion, first inland winter record for Alabama. Additional wintering terns not found often on Christmas Counts were a Gull-billed Tern in Mississippi Sound during the week of the Dauphin Island count and Sandwich Terns on three counts--a high of 10 at Pensacola with 3 at Bay County and 2 at Gulf Shores. Other species that are rare to uncommon in winter on the Gulf Coast, but which were seen on several coastal counts in 1975, were the White-eyed Vireo on five counts with highs of 9 at Gulf Shores and 5 at Marianna, the Black-and-White Warbler also on five counts with a high of 4 at Pensacola, and the Yellow-throated Warbler on four counts.

Wading Birds--Perhaps the relatively mild winter--our third in a row--might also have accounted for the frequency of observation of some of our wading birds. The Green Heron was seen on five coastal counts with highs of 3 at Dauphin Island and Marianna. The Cattle Egret rebounded from its low numbers last year to reports on or within the count period of six of the seven coastal counts with highs of 46 at Gulf Shores (an AOS Christmas Count record) and 10 at Dauphin Island. The Yellow-crowned Night Heron, the more southerly of the two night herons, was recorded on three of the coastal counts (2 each at Mobile and Dauphin Island and 1 at Pensacola for its sixth straight count record), while its relative, the Black-crowned, was reported on five counts with an AOS record number of 85 at Bay County and 58 (near a Christmas Count record) at Eufaula Refuge. The group at Bay County was attracted by a mariculture operation where the dikes were destroyed by Hurricane Eloise, exposing nearly a square mile of mudflat. Particularly significant were the Glossy Ibis within the count period at Wheeler Wildlife Refuge, the first winter record for Alabama, and two Reddish Egrets at Bay County. The American Bittern, a more northerly wading bird, appeared on five counts, including a record 7 at Eufaula Refuge and 1 as far inland as Tuscaloosa. White Ibises were seen on only two counts compared with five the previous two years; but a Northwest Florida Christmas Count record of 14 were observed at Pensacola, the other report being 3 at Marianna.

"Endangered" Species--Species high on the food chain are still suffering from persistent pesticide residues. It is, therefore, encouraging to report immature Bald Eagles at both Wheeler and Eufaula Refuges, that at Wheeler for the seventh straight year one has been seen there either on the count or within the count periods and that at Eufaula being the second straight year for reports from that area. Similarly

encouraging are the Osprey at Bay County the the one within the count week at Dauphin Island. On the other hand, the Brown Pelican still seems to be suffering in our area. Although the 8 reported this year (3 each at Dauphin Island and Bay County and 2 at Fort Morgan) are a slight increase over 1974, they are much lower than the numbers found on the 1972 and 1973 counts.

Hawks--Most hawks are included on the "Blue List" of species not yet considered endangered but whose numbers are reported on the decline (American Birds (1975), 29(6):1067-72). On the AOS counts, Sharp-shins were again found on six counts, but the total number decreased from 17 to 10, while single Cooper's Hawks were reported on five counts. The Red-shouldered Hawk is included on the "Blue List" primarily because of reports from other areas. On the AOS counts, it was reported on all but one for a total of 52 birds, an increase from 44 on the 1974 counts. The Red-tailed Hawk (not on the "Blue List") seems to be doing well, being reported on all 13 counts with highest or next highest count records on eight of them. Its 43 at Eufaula Refuge is the second highest inland coastal plain record and the 39 at Tuscaloosa the third. A Peregrine Falcon (also an endangered species) was reported within the count week at Gulf Shores, and single Merlins (or Pigeon Hawks) both there and at Jacksonville. While the Am. Kestrel remains on the decline around urban areas, it showed a slight increase over 1974 with the 62 at Gulf Shores being an AOS winter record and the 29 at Marion being a second highest inland record. Gulf Shores also reported a record Gulf Coast Christmas Count of 20 Marsh Hawks, and the 240 Black Vultures from a roost near Marion constitutes an AOS abundance record.

Birds of the Shore and Marsh--Destruction of habitat is always a threatening development, and rapidly diminishing beach areas have caused the Piping and Snowy Plovers to be included on the "Blue List," the latter being also listed as an endangered species in Alabama. Pippings were down from the 1974 counts, being reported on only three; but Snowys showed a slight increase in reports from four counts with Christmas Count records being set at Dauphin Island (15) and Bay County (8), the former an AOS Christmas Count record. The Am. Oystercatcher (also on the "Blue List") was reported from both Dauphin Island (3) and Fort Morgan (2). Changes in habitat were believed responsible for the absence of Sandhill Cranes at Gulf Shores last year along the intracoastal waterway, but this year a small group of 8 was found in a different but not too distant location southwest of Foley.

On the abundance side of the shorebird ledger, the fields and pastures of southern Baldwin County are perhaps the best habitat in the AOS area for our resident Killdeer, which set an AOS abundance record at Gulf Shores of 1087 (300 more than its previous high); and in similar habitat at Marion an inland high in abundance (423) was reported. The Dunlin again did well, being reported on 9 of the 13 counts as in 1974 with winter records for Northwest Florida (359 at Bay County), North Alabama (30 at Wheeler Refuge), and the Upper Coastal Plain (8 at Marion). The Spotted Sandpiper also did well, being again reported on six counts with a high of 14 at Pensacola (its seventh straight year and an AOS Christmas Count record) and 1 as far inland as Birmingham (third record in the last six years). The number of Am. Avocets at Mobile was considerably less than the abundance record of over 200 set last year, but the 31 reported there are its 14th Christmas Count record for the last 15 years. The Avocet was also recorded at Bay County, 2 for a first Northwest Florida Christmas Count record. The birds there were attracted by the mudflats at the destroyed mariculture operation as were 29 Greater Yellowlegs for a Northwest Florida Christmas Count record. Bay County also recorded high numbers of Ruddy Turnstones (106), Willets (70), and Black-bellied Plovers (64), the turnstones being an AOS Christmas Count record. The Red Knot set a Northwest Florida Christmas Count record there with 12, while its 30 at Dauphin Island is only one short of an AOS count record.

In addition to the Dunlins, Marion reported several noteworthy inland records for birds of the shore and marsh--2 Semipalmated Plovers, 5 Western Sandpipers, 2 Virginia Rails and an inland winter record in abundance for Least Sandpipers (155). Also inland, Eufaula Refuge recorded 8 Short-billed Dowitchers for its third consecutive Christmas Count record and a Black-bellied Plover for the first inland Christmas Count record.

Waterfowl--Waterfowl increased over recent years in North Alabama but still appeared low on the coast, particularly in the case of surface-feeding ducks there. Wheeler Refuge set records for Ring-necked Ducks (2285 for an AOS record), Am. Wigeon (or Baldpate) (6406 for the second highest AOS Christmas Count record), the blue phase of the Snow Goose (1530 for a second highest AOS record), Canvasback (531 for an AOS inland record), Wood Duck (476 for a Tenn. Valley record) and No. Shoveler (269 for another Tenn. Valley record). Also noteworthy were the Ring-necked Ducks at Tuscaloosa (392). There were some exceptions to the lack of waterfowl on the coast, the most notable being Redheads at Bay County (880--a relatively high number but greatly under records of over 2000 on that count), Buffleheads also at Bay County (267 for the second highest AOS record), Red-breasted Mergansers at Gulf Shores (694) and Blue-winged Teal at Fort Morgan (75 for an AOS Christmas Count record). Blue-winged Teal were also reported as far inland as Wheeler (9); and a Greater Scaup, closely identified with the full white wing-stripe, was reported at Marianna.

Winter Finches and Nuthatches--According to the "4-year cycle theory" for large invasions of boreal species, the coming winter of 1976-77 is due to be a high year. Therefore, the past winter shows that there was either a "3-year" exception between the previous record invasion of 1972-73 and the winter of 1975-76 or that the AOS area is in for some spectacular sightings this coming winter! On the 1975 counts, the 449 Evening Grosbeaks on four counts were double the number seen in 1972 on five and way over the 181 seen on two counts in the comparable Christmas Season, using the "4-year cycle," of 1971. Birmingham led with an AOS Christmas Count record of 338, Jacksonville followed with 90, and first count records were posted for Wheeler Refuge (13) and Marion (8). In Birmingham, the grosbeaks arrived on December 1 and remained through May 2.

The Purple Finch was seen on all 13 counts with a high of 324 at Birmingham (second highest AOS Christmas Count) and count records (ranging from 25 to 52) on four of the seven coastal counts. The Pine Siskin, whose movements seem more erratic than the others, tallied 325 on seven counts compared with only 27 on four in 1971 and 92 on five in 1972. Birmingham was high with 229 (another second highest AOS Christmas Count behind 1973's 234); Tuscaloosa was next with 81; and, in addition to all inland counts, a few were seen at Mobile (3) and Dauphin Island (1). Indicative of its erratic nature, the siskins virtually disappeared after Christmas and were hardly seen anywhere until spring.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch, which often accompanies an influx of boreal finches, almost doubled its Christmas Count total over last year--88 on eleven counts in 1975 as opposed to 47 on seven in 1974. Birmingham set an AOS count record with 34, Wheeler Refuge a Tenn. Valley record with 20, and Pensacola had 10. The Am. Goldfinch also did well with 542 at Birmingham, 456 at Marion (a Coastal Plain Christmas Count record), and 350 at Dauphin Island.

Sparrows--Although many counts of members of the sparrow tribe were low, often due to destruction of habitat around urban areas, a number of abundance records were set. They included: Savannah--941 at Marion (exceeded in the AOS area only by its record count of almost 1300 in 1974); Vesper--483 at Marion (an AOS record by over

200) and 142 at Marianna (a Northwest Florida record); Chipping--835 at Marianna (an AOS record, high numbers being reported as customary there every winter); White-crowned--64 at Marion (exceeded in the AOS area only by the record count of 111 at Wheeler Refuge in 1974); White-throats--over 1400 at Birmingham (third highest inland AOS record); and Fox--54 at Tuscaloosa (highest AOS Christmas Count outside of Birmingham). Among the large number of Slate-colored (now Dark-eyed) Juncos at Birmingham (1344) were 3 of the Pink-sided Oregon race (mearnsi), the fifth time in the last six counts they have been reported there. Another Pink-sided was found at Wheeler.

This year, the Bay County count extended its coverage of the count circle to Shell (or Hurricane) Island in the mouth of St. Andrew's Bay. The field party there, led by its compiler, "tromped through a lot of marsh" and stirred up an AOS record count of Sharp-tailed Sparrows (45). Grassland sparrows that, when found, are in low numbers were represented by Grasshopper Sparrows at Gulf Shores (5) and Eufaula Refuge (1) and within the count week at Marianna and by LeConte's at Eufaula (2) and Marianna (1). In addition, a Lincoln's Sparrow (principally a western species) was reported at Gulf Shores for its third straight Christmas Count record.

Chickadees through Kinglets and some others--Almost all of these small woodland passerines had excellent years. Perhaps some of the rise is due to increased detection of their presence by use of tapes since they all respond well to Screech Owl calls. This was particularly true for the Hermit Thrush and Ruby-crowned Kinglet, which had banner years. The thrush set an AOS record at Marianna (48), an Ala. record at Marion (41), and a Tenn. Valley record at Wheeler Refuge (29) with relatively high counts at Birmingham (36), Pensacola (24) and Fort Morgan (20). The Ruby-crowned Kinglet "blew off the roof," topping its record 1974 total for all counts by 1000 with a grand total of over 2300 birds. An AOS record was set at Birmingham (627--more than 300 over the previous high), a Coastal Plain record at Marion (399), a Tenn. Valley record at Wheeler (267), a Gulf Coast record at Marianna (251), and count records at Fort Morgan (197), Pensacola (165) and Gulf Shores (159). Its relative, the Golden-crowned, did well on most inland counts with a modern count record at Birmingham (191), a Tenn. Valley record at Wheeler (90), and a Coastal Plain record at Marion (72).

The Solitary Vireo had a record year, being reported on all eight counts from Tuscaloosa south and setting count records on six of them. Marianna led with an AOS record of 22 (noted as an especially good year there as compared with its 3 and 5 the previous two years) followed by Pensacola with 12 and Marion and Gulf Shores with 9 each. The Orange-crowned Warbler was found on 12 of the 13 counts, with highs at Gulf Shores (13) and Marianna (12) and 4 as far inland as Birmingham. The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher also did well with high numbers at Pensacola (28) and Gulf Shores (23) and 2 as far inland as Tuscaloosa.

All members of the wren family were reported in good numbers this past Christmas Season. The House Wren repeated its almost "clean sweep" of the counts, being found on 12 of the 13 with highs at Marianna (32 for a Northwest Florida winter record) and Gulf Shores (24) and 1 at Wheeler Refuge (the fourth in its last five counts). The Winter Wren set an AOS record at Wheeler (24) and a second highest for the AOS area at Birmingham (21). Bewick's Wrens (another species on the "Blue List") were reported from Wheeler (3) and Birmingham (2), and 2 Short-billed Marsh (or Sedge) Wrens (rare in winter north of the Coastal Plain) were found at Birmingham.

Other abundance records for small woodland species included: Carolina Chickadee--463 at Birmingham (an AOS record) and 94 at Marianna (a record for the Gulf Coast where it is found in much smaller numbers than inland); Brown-headed Nuthatch--235 at Birmingham (exactly tying the AOS record set on its 1975 fall count);

and Brown Creeper--16 at Birmingham (tying the AOS record) and 14 at Wheeler (its second highest count).

The Am. Robin was counted in the thousands at Birmingham and on all seven coastal counts, the high being almost 6000 at Gulf Shores. The Eastern Bluebird, while not on the "Blue List," is still being recorded in low numbers on Christmas Counts near large urban areas such as Birmingham and Mobile. However, Bay County set a Northwest Florida record (144) and record or second highest Christmas Count numbers were reported from Gulf Shores (108), Pensacola (90), Eufaula Refuge (69) and Marion (58). On the other hand, the Loggerhead Shrike, which is on the "Blue List," was reported in very low numbers on the AOS counts with the exceptions of Gulf Shores (50) and Marianna (40).

Woodpeckers--Most of the woodpeckers are apparently doing well in the AOS area. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, again as on the 1973 counts, did well virtually everywhere with high numbers at Birmingham (57 for an AOS area record), Wheeler Refuge and Marion (each 45, the former a Tenn. Valley record), Marianna (43 for a Gulf Coast winter record), Pensacola (40), and Gulf Shores (37 for an Alabama Gulf Coast winter record). Birmingham also set an AOS area record for Downy Woodpeckers (146) and a Christmas Count record for Red-bellied Woodpeckers (108). In addition, the Red-bellied was recorded in high numbers at Gulf Shores (77) and at Pensacola (69 for a Northwest Florida Christmas Count record), and the Downy's 17 at Gulf Shores is a Gulf Coast record since that woodpecker is found in much lower numbers on the coast than inland. The Com. (or Yellow-shafted) Flicker did well also with an inland coastal plain record at Marion (107), a Northwest Florida record at Marianna (91), and a high number at Dauphin Island (88). On the other hand, the Red-headed Woodpecker, although recorded on 12 of the counts, appears to be in a near state of collapse and perhaps should be placed on the "Blue List," its numbers on Christmas Counts having fallen from 114 in 1973 to 45 this year. One reason for the decline is attributed to loss of nesting sites to the Com. Starling; but clearing of trees with dead limbs, which it seems to prefer for nesting sites, may also be a contributing factor.

Other Non-passerines--Other notable non-passerine observations included an Eared Grebe at Gulf Shores, a White Pelican within the count period at Wheeler Refuge, being a sequel to the one found on its count the previous year, Anhingas at Marianna (15 for a Northwest Florida Christmas Count record) and at Pensacola (2), a Limpkin also at Marianna for its third consecutive Christmas Count, and single Whip-poor-wills at Dauphin Island and Gulf Shores.

At Bay County, the intensive coverage at Shell Island also contributed to high numbers of gulls and terns--1247 Bonaparte's Gulls (an AOS Christmas Count record), 1344 Ring-billed Gulls (a Northwest Florida Christmas Count record), 640 Laughing Gulls, and 337 Forster's Terns (an AOS winter record). Dauphin Island had the second highest AOS winter record, however, for the Laughing Gull (1230) and an AOS winter record for Black Skimmers (500).

Other non-passerine records in abundance included: Pied-billed Grebe--93 at Bay County (a Gulf Coast record) and 83 at Jacksonville (high for the Mountain Region except for Birmingham counts); Snowy Egret--65 at Dauphin Island; Bob-white--122 at Eufaula Refuge (an inland Christmas Count record, although most counts reported numbers under those in 1974); Com. Gallinule--22 at Bay County; Am. Coot--3000 at Jacksonville (a modern Mountain Region record); and Belted Kingfisher--46 at Pensacola (high for Northwest Florida outside of previous records at Bay County, which recorded 38 this year). In addition, very energetic nighttime observing produced Christmas Count records for Screech Owls on six counts with the highest being at Birmingham (75--

also an AOS Christmas Count record), Gulf Shores (35) and Wheeler Refuge (34), as well as an AOS Christmas Count record for Barred Owls at Marianna (11).

Other Passerines--The most sizable passerine records in abundance were set by the Fish Crow at Marianna (over 10,000, which is 5500 higher than the previous Christmas Count record) and the Tree Swallow at Gulf Shores (almost 5000, which is 3000 over the previous Christmas Count record). Other passerine records in abundance included: Eastern Phoebe--a remarkable 64 at Marianna (just shy of an AOS Christmas Count record) with good numbers at Gulf Shores (31) and Fort Morgan (28); Horned Lark--628 at Wheeler Refuge (an AOS Christmas Count record); Blue Jay--448 at Pensacola (a Northwest Florida record); Water Pipit--313 at Gulf Shores (the second highest AOS record); Cedar Waxwing--1037 at Marion (the second highest AOS record outside of Birmingham); Myrtle Warbler--2751 at Gulf Shores (another second highest AOS record) and 873 at Marion (an inland abundance record); Com. Yellowthroat--44 at Gulf Shores (an AOS winter record) and relatively high numbers at Fort Morgan (23) and Marianna (19); Brewer's Blackbird--955 at Marion (being exceeded there only by its record count of over 2500 in 1974); Com. Grackle--almost 17,000 at Marianna (a Gulf Coast abundance record); and Brown-headed Cowbird--unfortunately, high counts away from roosts of almost 3500 at Birmingham (a Mountain Region record) and over 2500 at Marion.

On the 1975 counts, a record 204 species were observed on the counts and during the count weeks with 199 on the counts themselves (the full count period being Dec. 20 through Jan. 4). Complete tabulations of all species on the Christmas Counts will appear in Vol. 30, No. 2 of American Birds. The counts editor extends our thanks for their good efforts and cooperation to all participants and especially to the compilers. A summary of the 13 Christmas Counts in the AOS area is as follows:

Count, Date and Compiler	Species(a)		Total Individuals	Partici- pants	Parties	Party- Hours
	On Count	Within Count Week				
Wheeler Wildlife Refuge-- Dec. 20 (J. Milton Harris)	101	103	78,976	29	6	75
Birmingham--Dec. 27 (Thomas A. Imhof)	96	98	36,523	36	11	112
Jacksonville--Dec. 20 (C. William Summerour)	73	74	7,761	16(b)	3	29
Tuscaloosa--Jan. 3 (Richard K. Crawford)	82	82	8,499	10	4	35
Marion--Dec. 21 (James V. Peavy, Jr.)	93	93	70,325	12	5	46
Eufaula Wildlife Refuge-- Jan. 4 (Sam Pate, Jr.)	119	119	15,628	10	6	55
Mobile--Jan. 3 (Richard E. Hayward, Jr.)	121	126	16,389	17	9	69
Dauphin Island--Dec. 20 (M. Wilson Gaillard)	128	131	15,009	22	10	66.5
Ft. Morgan--Dec. 27 (Mary Lou Mattis & Sherlie E. Gade)	110	111	11,192	14	5	46
Gulf Shores--Jan. 3 (P. Fairly Chandler)	142	145	36,661	30	8	80.5
Pensacola--Dec. 20 (Robert A. Duncan)	118	122	14,002	39	10	97
Marianna--Dec. 27 (Marion W. Gray)	96	100	35,126	14(b)	7	56.5
Bay County (Panama City)-- Dec. 20 (Stephen J. Stedman)	138	143	23,623	25(b)	10	90

(a) Species combined in the 1973 revision of the AOU Check-List are treated separately in this article and the above table because reported separately on the Christmas Counts. This treatment affects geese, orioles and juncos.

(b) Additional observers at feeders.

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THE SEASON, WINTER-SPRING

December, 1975, through May, 1976

Thomas A. Imhof

This report is a long, tough job, and, if it is to continue, we need the cooperation of all contributors. Please submit all unusual records on 3x5 cards such as those provided for the asking by Dr. Robert J. Newman, L.S.U. Museum of Zoology, Drawer MU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803. Include on the card all information possible. After September 1 when the second edition of Alabama Birds is available, contributors will be better able to determine which of their records are noteworthy. Records for "Sight On, Sound Off" in Flicker Flashes or for observations sighted in M.B.C. News need not be put on cards unless the contributor wants them to be published in Alabama Birdlife or American Birds. The time spent in recent past transcribing records and getting them in AOU order and looking up their significance has reached the point where it makes a Season column prohibitive. All neighboring states submit all their records to American Birds on cards, and Alabama must follow suit. The present report contains at least 150 records of 117 species. This reporter simply does not have enough time to type up that many cards with all the evaluation and attention to detail it requires. I think we all want a Season column, so please help.

WEATHER: Dec. 15 - Feb. 9 was cold and, for Birmingham, included 10 days with temperature 20° or lower, and temperatures were 7° per day below normal. February was very dry with measurable rainfall on only 1 or 2 days. The last temperature 32° or below was a 30° on Feb. 23, and only 1 or 2 readings since then have been in the low 30's. March was warm and very rainy, Tuscaloosa received about four times its normal rainfall, Birmingham at least twice normal. Foliage developed at least two weeks early. April was a period of transition from a warm, wet March to a damp and record cold May.

COUNTS (in coastal Alabama unless otherwise noted):

- Mar. 13, M.B.C., 84 species.
- Apr. 3, M.O.S.-M.B.C., 130 species.
- Apr. 8, JVP, HME, GDJ, one party, 142 species.
- Apr. 9-10-11, A.O.S., 158 species.
- May 1, M.B.C. (13 observers), 109 species.
- May 1, Birmingham B.A.S., 163 party-hours, a record 155 species, 31 warblers.
- May 3, JVP, GDJ, one party, 150 species.
- May 16, Lookout Mtn, B.A.S., 44 party-hours, 108 species, 28 warblers.
- June 1, TAI, HHK, one party, 112 species, only 11 warblers.

MIGRATION PEAKS (Dauphin Island, fide MAG unless otherwise noted):

- Mar. 22, Parula, Gnatcatcher, Yellow-thr. Warbler, White-eyed Vireo.
- Mar. 27, Prothonotary, Palm Warblers, Orchard Oriole, vireos, Indigo Bunting.
- Mar. 29, Prothonotary, Parula, Indigo Bunting.
- Apr. 4-7, Ft. Morgan, JVP banded 200 including 103 on 7th with 73 White-eyed Vireos, 21 Hooded Warblers, 20 Wood Thrushes, 20 White-throated Sparrows, 10 Prothonotary Warblers.
- Apr. 5-9, Ft. Morgan, TAI banded 389 including 114 on 6th, 124 on 7th, 101 on 8th with 108 White-eyed Vireos, 50 Prothonotary Warblers, 43 Hooded Warblers, 40 Wood Thrushes, 31 Red-eyed Vireos, 19 Kentucky Warblers, 16 Worm-eating Warblers, 8 Swainson's Warblers, Lincoln's Sparrow.
- Apr. 6, Painted Bunting, Summer Tanager, Hooded Warbler.
- Apr. 22, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager.
- May 8, Red-eyed Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak.
- May 14 (rain), REH banded 53 including 14 Acadian Flycatchers and 13 species of warblers.
- May 25, at least 9 species of migrant warblers still on Dauphin (REH, SBH).

On Dauphin, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Bobolink, Veery and Scarlet Tanager predominant. Noteworthy records for period follow (TV-Tennessee Valley, Mtr-Mountain Region, UCP-Upper Coastal Plain, GC-Gulf Coast, CP-Coastal Plain, rec-record, mob-many other birders):

Arctic Loon: Dec. 27-31 (B.A.S. mob) 1st State rec. See ABL 23(3-4): 16.
Eared Grebe: Jan. 3, Gulf Shores (fide PFC); Fairhope Feb. 15, (A&MN).
White Pelican: mid-Nov. to Jan. 31, Wheeler Ref. (TZA, others), rare winter TV.
Brown Pelican: usual warm weather increase, max so far 100, May 25, Dauphin I., (LRT) shows about half immatures (LRT, TAI).
Masked Booby: off Dauphin I., 3 on Apr. 6 (RWH) and 4 on Apr. 8 (JVP, HME, GDJ); 6th year in a row for Ala. recorded mostly Jan. and Apr., but also July & Sept.
Magnificent Frigatebird: Dec. 16, Dauphin I. (DB, RWH), 3rd Dec. rec.
Cattle Egret: Mar. 4, Bullock Co. near Midway (JEK) & Mar. 7, Lakeland Farm (ALM) earliest inland recs, which seem to get earlier each year.
Reddish Egret: Jan. 18, Dauphin I. (LPA, LRT) 3rd winter rec, 1st Jan.
Louisiana Heron: Wheeler Ref., Apr. 20 thru May 29 (CDC, CAS, many), 3rd TV rec.
Black-crowned Night Heron: Wheeler Ref. 2 on Jan. 13 (ALM, CAS, JTG); Eufaula Ref. on Jan. 3 (BSP); Dauphin I. all winter and spring, max 14 on Mar. 29 (CSP, DLP, RWH).
Glossy Ibis: at Wheeler Ref, through Dec. 18 (RMB, CAS, ENW, WCD); Apr. 8 at Ft. Morgan (JVP, HME, GDJ) earliest on coast; 7 adults & 4 nests with young on May 26 on Cat I. (GG, PJ).
Canada Goose: hutchinsii bird last seen at Oak Mtn. Lake on May 1 (ALM, others).
Brant: Nov. 9 through at least May 1 at Hoover and East Lake (HHK photo, & many). 3rd Ala. rec.
Snow Goose (blue phase): B'ham, 3 birds present through May 1 on 3 lakes (B.A.S.).
White-fronted Goose: Eufaula Ref. 2 on Jan. 24 (JMi, BSP); Tuscaloosa, 4 on Mar. 20 & 21 (JCT, many), recorded annually now in Alabama.
Duck Flight: Little publicized is the regular and steady coastal flight of thousands of ducks and geese westward both in November and April each year. The birds, mostly Blue-winged Teal and Lesser Scaup but often large numbers of Gadwall, American Wigeon or Shoveler, go by all day long in flocks of 2-100. Apparently the fall birds are those headed for the Louisiana coast that have drifted too far eastward, the spring birds those that wintered in Florida and beyond and are headed for the Mississippi Valley. Most birds are a mile or more offshore and in bad light and so are often impossible to identify. For instance, on April 4 (a sunny Sunday with beaches crowded and wind SW) one observer (TAI) in 7 hours recorded offshore 55 Blue-winged Teal, 300 Lesser Scaup, 1 Red-breasted Merganser and 350 ducks sp.
Fulvous Tree Duck: Jan. 8, Wheeler Ref. (DV) 2 collected, 2nd TV rec.
Gadwall: Jan. 17, 60, LeGarde's Lake near Anniston (B.A.S.) Mtr max.
Green-winged Teal: May 1, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), latest for inland Ala.
Blue-winged Teal: May 26, Cat I., nest & 10 eggs (GG, PJ).
Common Goldeneye: Dec. 17, 41, Birmingham (ALM, others), max away from GC and TV.
Oldsquaw: Jan. 3-6, Tuscaloosa (JCT).
White-winged Scoter: Decatur, 3 on Feb. 16 (DCH), latest inland rec.
Surf Scoter: Feb. 3, Decatur (ALM, CAS, SFH); Feb. 7, spec. USNM (JLW), 2nd TV, 4th inland rec.
Ruddy Duck: May 31, Wheeler Ref., pair (CDC); June 1, Gulf Shores, male (TAI, HHK) both latest Ala.
Common Merganser: Jan. 3, Eufaula Ref. (FFL), rare south of TV.
Swallow-tailed Kite: Mar. 3, Dauphin I. (REH, RWH) early.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: Apr. 6, Dauphin I. (RWH); May 1, B'ham (IFS party); and May 3, Choctaw NWR (JVP, GDJ).
Broad-winged Hawk: Feb. 27, Fairhope (A&MN) wintering or early spring?
Swainson's Hawk: Feb. 3, Midway, Bullock Co. (JEK), 10th rec for Ala., 1st Feb.
Rough-legged Hawk: Apr. 8, Gulf Shores (JVP, HME, GDJ) latest Ala.
Golden Eagle: late Nov. to mid-Jan. at Wheeler Ref. (fide TZA).

Bald Eagle: Wheeler Ref. an immature late Nov. to mid-Jan. & an adult Jan. 24 (WCD); Guntersville, an immature (the Wheeler bird?) Jan. 28 (HBT, others).

Northern Harrier (Marsh Hawk): May 1, Birmingham (WFC) ties latest McR.

Osprey: May 17, Marion (JVP); Jan. 23, Dauphin I. (REH, SBH); no others away from coast.

Peregrine Falcon: near Magnolia Springs, Jan. 4 (JVP); Dauphin I., Jan. 15 (REH, RWH), Mar. 13 (M.B.C.), & Apr. 8 (JVP, HME, GDJ).

Merlin: Apr. 22, downtown Birmingham, a male (RRR); Apr. 24, Mulga, just west of Birmingham, a female (TAI, IFS).

Sandhill Crane: change in land use and water level in area where 30 have wintered is probable reason why only 8 could be found this year (PFC).

Virginia Rail: Apr. 21, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), earliest spring TV.

Sora: Apr. 3, two, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), earliest spring TV; May 1, 3rd year in a row at Spain Lake, Birmingham (HHK).

Black Rail: Dec. 25, Alabama Port, dead on road (BS), 1st State winter rec; Apr. 7 & May 3 at Ft. Morgan (JVP, others); Apr. 8 on Dauphin (JVP, HME, GDJ); has been recorded in Alabama 6 years in a row, mostly in April.

Purple Gallinule: Jan. 3, Gulf Shores (GDJ, CBC), 1st winter rec Ala.; Mar. 22, Dauphin I. (CSp, DLP), early.

American Oystercatcher: Apr. 12, two pairs nesting on Cat & Little Dauphin Is. (GG).

Semipalmated Plover: Apr. 21, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), earliest TV.

Black-bellied Plover: May 29, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), latest inland spring rec.

Common Snipe: May 29, lower Lamar County (JCT), latest rec for State (summered once Wheeler).

Long-billed Curlew: May 3, Battleship Pk, Mobile (JVP, GDJ), probably occurs annually.

Whimbrel: Mar. 28, Dauphin I. (JTW), 1st March rec Ala.

Upland Sandpiper: Mar. 31, two, Lakeland Farm, Marion (HHK, HBT, ALM), only report.

Spotted Sandpiper: Apr. 20, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), earliest TV.

Solitary Sandpiper: Feb. 15 to at least Mar. 14, Magnolia Springs (HHK, PFC, EGR, RRR), 1st winter rec; May 30, Wheeler Ref. (DCH), latest Ala. except June 3, '74 Marion.

Pectoral Sandpiper: Dec. 18, 9, Wheeler Ref. (DCH), 3rd winter rec inland; Feb. 22, Cochrane Causeway (TAI, JTW, BHW, A&MN), 5th Feb. rec Ala.

A late February shorebird flight, which includes Golden Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper and quite possibly Spotted, Solitary, Least, Western and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Black-necked Stilt and Wilson's Phalarope, may prove to be very substantial.

White-rumped Sandpiper: May 17, Marion Hatchery, 100 (JVP), inland max.

Least Sandpiper: June 1, Blakely I., Mobile, 5 (TAI, HHK), latest rec State.

Dunlin: Dec. 20, Wheeler Ref., 30 (HME, ALM, RJC); Jan. 17, Marion (JCT); Feb. 3, Wheeler Ref., 50 (ALM, GAS, SFH), wintering regularly inland.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: Apr. 21, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), earliest TV.

Western Sandpiper: June 1, Blakely I., Mobile (HHK, TAI), latest coast.

Short-billed Dowitcher: May 18, Wheeler Ref. seen and heard (CDC), latest inland Ala.

Stilt Sandpiper: Apr. 22, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), earliest inland Ala.

Hudsonian Godwit: Apr. 10, Cedar Pt. (JLD), 3rd rec Ala.

American Avocet: Dec. 12, Wheeler Ref., 3 (DCH), latest inland rec.

Black-necked Stilt: Mar. 27, Ft. Morgan, 13 (PFC), species now regular mid-Feb. to mid-Oct.

Wilson's Phalarope: Apr. 26 & 27, Courtland (JVP, WRM, many); May 18, Wheeler Ref. (ALM, SFH, ENP); 1st and 2nd inland spring recs for Ala.

Parasitic Jaeger: Dec. 20, Dauphin I. (REH).

Ring-billed Gull: Apr. 9, Alabama Pt. color-marked bird indicates it was banded near Rogers City, Presque Isle Co., Michigan in 1970 by Dr. Wm. Southern (MLB, CDC, RM).

Bonaparte's Gull: Mar. 16, Lakeland Farm, Marion (GDJ, ALM, JVP), 1st inland CP spring rec.

Gull-billed Tern: Dec. 17, Dauphin I. (RWH).

Forster's Tern: Apr. 26, Guntersville (JVP, WRM), earliest TV.

Common Tern: Mar. 12 & 13, Decatur (DCH), earliest inland rec Ala.
 Black Tern: Jan. 3, Alabama Point (HHK, RRR, EGR, others), 2nd winter rec Ala.
 White-winged Dove: Dec. 24, Huntsville, specimen (fide TZA), 1st rec north of CP, 4th inland; Apr. 29, Dauphin I (AGT), late.
 Ground Dove: Apr. 20, Mooresville (CDC).
 Ani sp: Dec. 20, Theodore, 2 (JTW, BHW), in good light no grooves noticed, but no high ridge noticed either. Only previous ani rec is a Groove-billed in nearby Mobile, Dec. 28, 1965. It would be stretching it to add a new species, Smooth-billed Ani, to the State list on the basis of a negative field mark--no grooves. Birds were probably immature Groove-billed.
 Screech Owl: Mar. 23, Dauphin I. (DLP); one June 5, 1975, on Breeding Bird Survey on or near Dauphin I. (JLD); this owl virtually unrecorded on Dauphin.
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird: Mar. 19, Birmingham (MAS), earliest Mtr.
 Rufous Hummingbird: Dec. 25 to Jan. 13, six, 5 on Dauphin I., 1 in Bayou La Batre (CSp, RWH, REH, LRT), max Ala.
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: Jan. 5, Fairhope (LPA).
 Willow Flycatcher (fitz-bew): May 24, Ft. Morgan (PFC), 2nd spring rec Ala., 1st in CP.
 Olive-sided Flycatcher: May 5, Wheeler Ref. (ALM, CAS); May 12, Oak Mtn. (ALM, HHH, SFH); May 16, Lookout Mtn. (GDJ).
 Vermilion Flycatcher: Dec. 1 & 2, Pelham, Shelby Co. (RS), 1st rec north of CP; Jan. 21 to Feb. 28, Magnolia Springs (PFC, many).
 Tree Swallow: Feb. 22, Oak Mtn. (ALM, B&GS), 2nd Feb. rec Mtr.
 Bank Swallow: Mar. 27, Ft. Morgan (PFC), earliest Ala. by over a week.
 Barn Swallow: Mar. 17, Lake Purdy, B'ham (ALM), earliest Mtr; Mar. 13, Lake Lurleen (JCT), earliest UCP.
 Purple Martin: Jan. 13, Mobile (JLD), earliest Ala.; Jan. 25, Greenwood, Jefferson Co., 2 males (CWB), on warm front, earliest Mtr.
 House Wren: May 4, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), latest TV.
 Bewick's Wren: Mar. 28, Lake Purdy, 2; May 16, 2 mi. north of Ft. Payne, 2; June 6, Lisman, Choctaw Co., 3 (all by RRR, champion Bewick's Wren-finder assisted by EGR).
 Gray-cheeked Thrush: Mar. 21, Spring Hill, Mobile (MAG).
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet: In spite of heavy attraction to Screech Owl tapes, larger than ever winter population around Birmingham is shown by 5 on Sept. 20, earliest Mtr; 627 on Dec. 27 Christmas Count, state max; and 104 still present on May 1 (B.A.S.).
 White-eyed Vireo: Mar. 10, Ebenezer Swamp, Shelby Co. (ALM), earliest Mtr.
 Yellow-throated Vireo: Feb. 28, Magnolia Springs (PFC); Mar. 7, Dauphin I. (REH); early or wintering?
 Warbling Vireo: Mar. 28, Dauphin I. (JTW), 1st March rec Ala.; May 1, Hoover, B'ham (HHK); May 8, B'ham Zoo (JVP); May 24, Spring Hill (JLD, MAG), latest migrant Ala. (Philadelphia conversely was scarce, 1 known rec, Apr. 9, Dauphin.)
 Prothonotary Warbler: Mar. 7, Dauphin I. (REH), earliest State.
 Golden-winged Warbler: May 8, Dauphin I., 4 (RWH), latest State.
 Brewster's Warbler: Apr. 29, Birmingham (ALM), 3rd spring rec Ala.
 Blue-winged Warbler: Mar. 21, Mtn. Brook, B'ham (RRR), earliest inland Ala.
 Orange-crowned Warbler: Dec. 20, Wheeler Ref. (HHK), Feb. 14, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), possibly same bird, 2nd winter TV.
 Nashville Warbler: May 10 & 13, Decatur (MB), ties latest rec for State and TV.
 Cape May Warbler: Mar. 22, Dauphin I. (CSp, DLP), earliest State; May 11, Wheeler Ref. (CDC), latest TV; May 16, Lookout Mtn, 3 (3 B.A.S. parties), latest Mtr.
 Black-throated Blue Warbler: Apr. 26-27-28, Dauphin I., 3 banded (REH).
 Myrtle Warbler: May 16, Lookout Mtn (PLT, others), ties latest for Mtr & State.
 Yellow-throated Warbler: Mar. 10, Ebenezer Swamp, Shelby Co. (HHK, HBT, SFH), earliest Mtr.
 Chestnut-sided Warbler: Mar. 27, Dauphin I. (RWH), 1st March rec Ala.
 Palm Warbler: May 16, Lookout Mtn (RJD), latest Mtr.
 Northern Waterthrush: Jan. 15, Dauphin I. (DDN, LRT), 2nd winter rec Ala.
 Louisiana Waterthrush: Mar. 4, Lovick, Jefferson Co. (DJH), earliest inland Ala.

Connecticut Warbler: May 7, Dauphin I., banded (REH), 3rd spring rec GC, 10th Ala.
 Wilson's Warbler: Mar. 25-29, Birmingham (JWS, RRR), seen well & studied at leisure,
 a full month earlier than other Ala. recs, probably pertains to a western bird
 which often winters U.S. east to La.; eastern birds are notably late migrants.

Northern (Baltimore) Oriole: Feb. 28 to Mar. 8, Montgomery (JEK); Jan. 30, Birmingham
 (MLM).

Northern (Bullock's) Oriole: Jan. 3, Bon Secour (PFC, VDH).

Rusty Blackbird: Feb. 22, Fairhope, 100 (A&MN), unusual number for GC.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Mar. 28, Dauphin I. (JTW), 1st March rec Ala.; May 25, Dauphin
 I. (DDN), ties latest Ala.; 96 killed at building in Birmingham with bad
 reflections (JAT).

Black-headed Grosbeak: May 24, 9 mi. east of Ft. Morgan (PFC), an immature male,
 3 weeks later than any other Alabama rec.

Blue Grosbeak: Apr. 17, Grant, Marshall Co. (CDC), earliest TV.

Painted Bunting: Mar. 12, Gulf Shores, a male which died (WFR), earliest Ala. by 2
 weeks.

Evening Grosbeak: Mar. 13, Wind Creek Pk, 200 (BD); Mar. 14, Tuscaloosa, 300 max.(JCT);
 Montgomery, common in Mar. & Apr. (JEK); Birmingham, max. about 500 in Mar. &
 Apr. (B.A.S.); very few birds recorded farther south.

Pine Siskin: uncommon in mid-winter, but numbers built up again in March & April;
 last seen on coast, Apr. 18 at Fairhope (A&MN); 15 still in Birmingham May 1
 (JVP, TAI).

Green-tailed Towhee: Jan. 3 & 4, Magnolia Springs (PFC, many) seen well, 2nd Ala. rec.
 Dark-eyed Junco: May 1, Mtn Brook, Birmingham, could not fly (IFS party); May 5, East
 Lake, on Red Mt., Birmingham (RDB); very late.

White-crowned Sparrow: Mar. 28, 15 immature, 3 adults, Fairhope (A&MN), GC max.

White-throated Sparrow: May 13, last on coast, 3 on Dauphin I.(DB) and 1 Spring Hill
 (MWG); Birmingham, Mtn Brook, May 20 (RRR), Ensley, May 19, 21 & 27, last a
 banded bird, apparently banded by JMI May 8 (TAI).

Correction: It seems best, until further evidence is gathered, to withhold the records
 of House Finch and Mourning Warbler of fall, 1975.

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IS ANYBODY OUT THERE LISTENING?

Greg D. Jackson

A certain eeriness pervades the calm of the night, brought on partly by the glowing full moon. All is quiet as you stand alone on the road transversing the deep forest. Suddenly you start as an ear-piercing scream is emitted directly above you. A banshee?? A cry of death?? The answer soon comes in the form of paired, rhythmic hoots. Soon three more Barred Owls join in the chorus, and you are enveloped in a cacophony of sounds of every description: Hoots, screams, barks, cackles and yelps. Such can be the experience we know as owling.

Though people have listened to the calling of the owls for centuries, it has only been in recent years that efficient owling techniques have been developed. Usually efficient, hard-striking owling operations are in conjunction with Christmas and migration bird counts. Nearly every count in Alabama has the potential of getting over 100 Screech Owls. The owls are there; it is only the work by the birders that is usually lacking. The main reason for this potential of getting large numbers of owls on a count is the portable cassette recorder. This handy device has revolutionized the sport of owling. A tape of owl calls can be made in a variety of ways. One method is to record the tape from a phonograph record of bird songs. Since only a few calls of each species are on the record, you have to keep resetting the needle when the call is finished to get the desired number of repetitions. Obviously a much easier alternative is to record a tape from someone who has already made such a recording. With sufficient recording equipment, you may prefer to record directly from owls in the field, but recording at home is often easier.

The response to the tape varies from species to species. The Screech Owl will readily respond to a recorded or whistled imitation of its call. This response will normally take place at any time of year, though the best results are usually obtained in fall and early winter prior to the breeding season. The response to the tape is probably a form of territorial defense, but the birds may sometimes just call for the sake of calling. Under normal conditions in good territory, it is often possible for a single party to get over 50 Screech Owls in a single morning from midnight to dawn. The best areas for Screech Owls are wooded areas near openings or water. When deep woods, water and open areas are in conjunction, results are often optimal.

Owling techniques vary, but I usually use the following procedure for Screech Owls. I try to pick a wooded area with some water through which a road cuts an opening. Driving along the road, I stop about every one-half mile to play the tape. In good areas, you may be able to shorten the distances between stops to possibly one-third-mile segments of road, but care must be taken to avoid double-counting. I usually play the tape continuously for about two minutes and then stop to listen. If there is no response, I play the recording for another two minutes unless an owl is heard during that time. If, after five or six minutes of playing the tape, no response is heard, it is probably fruitless to continue, and it is better to move to the next stop. But, getting no owls at a stop in good areas is unusual. One or two owls per stop is to be expected in good territory. When you get a fairly quick reaction from a single bird, it often pays to play the tape a little longer to call up one or possibly more additional birds. The important thing is to give the birds adequate time to respond without wasting too much time at a single stop. Occasionally, you may call up three, four, or even five or more Screech Owls at one stop. Getting five Screech Owls going at once around you is quite an experience. Often the owls can be observed silently flying back and forth over your head in an effort to see what strange type of intruder is about.

Barred Owls can be attracted with a certain degree of regularity, but usually a much greater amount of patience is required. Extensive deep woods or swamps (predominantly hardwood) are usually required for a good Barred Owl population. Even in the proper area, it can sometimes take ten or fifteen minutes to get a Barred Owl to respond to the tape. At stops where I feel there is a good chance for a Barred Owl, I use the following procedure: I play about two minutes of Barred Owl calls, switch to Screech Owl calls and play them long enough to attract the nearby Screech Owls, and then switch back to the Barred Owl tape for a few minutes. This procedure usually allows enough time for the somewhat lethargic Barred Owls to react. The switching between the different calls when combined with the vocalizations of the local Screech Owls often has a desirable effect on the Barred Owls. In fact, you can sometimes call up a Barred Owl with a Screech Owl tape, or vice versa. The "conversation" between two or more Barred Owls when you get them going can really add some spice to owling.

Great Horned and Barn Owls, our other two breeding owls in Alabama, can be attracted to a tape but much more infrequently and erratically than the Screech and Barred Owls. Great Horned Owls call most often during the twilight hours but may also be heard at other times of the night. The method outlined for attracting Barred Owls is also one of the best for calling a Great Horned Owl. Barn Owls are a different matter in that they often respond - when they do respond - rather quickly to the tape, so do not play the recording very long before stopping to listen. They are unpredictable, however, so the results may vary.

Weather conditions are often a determinant to the success of owling. Ideal conditions consist of a clear night with a full moon and no wind. Heavy rain may wipe out an owling operation, but owls can be attracted, to a certain degree, in light rain. Wind is probably the most critical factor - your owl count on a windless night will be much higher than on a count when the wind is whipping through the trees. The main reason for this is that on a windy night, even though the owls may respond, you probably will not be able to hear them. The moon is also a factor; the more moonlight the better, but it is not absolutely necessary to have moonlight and a clear sky to attract owls.

Though owling can be done with little trouble - and much enjoyment can be derived from it - it is work. An all-night owling expedition can be tough if done properly, and the crunch really comes when you have to count diurnal birds the next day. Although it is work, when you are getting owls, it is just like anything else that is enjoyable - you usually do not feel tired until long after you are finished. The adrenalin gets flowing when you are getting a lot of owls, and it can be a rewarding experience. Part of the experience is the realization of the different nature of the woods at night. The trees, the shrubs, everything takes on a different aspect with the setting of the sun. It is quieter, and sounds travel farther, so that you can hear many things you have not noticed during the day. Discovering the many nocturnal creatures themselves is fascinating. There are so many things that you never discover until you spend time outdoors at night, and owling for a count is an excellent method of finding these things. After all, a count is supposed to get a representative sample of all the species in a count circle - not just the diurnal ones. There is also a certain amount of pride and prestige associated with coming to a compilation with 50 or more owls on your list. You can take pride in the work you have done. Like getting a rare bird on a count, successful owling can be exhilarating and can give you a good feeling of accomplishment. More work is needed on the nocturnal birds; and, if birders would spend more time owling on counts or at other times, valuable data could be accumulated. So, get out into the woods at night next count and discover what you are missing!

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NOTE ON BEWICK'S WRENS

Robert R. Reid, Jr.

Observers have widely noted the extreme reduction in population of Bewick's Wren in Alabama over the past decade or more; and, in fact, its reduction in numbers has been a cause of concern throughout the East. (See the "Blue List," American Birds (1975), 29(6):1067-72.) For example, this wren was formerly seen on virtually all counts in the Birmingham area; but now its presence in Alabama has been severely restricted although for the last three Christmas Seasons totals of 5-6 were reported on the AOS Christmas Counts. In 1976, however, the writer found 3 birds in northern Choctaw County on June 6 while running the Choctaw-Sumter Breeding Bird Survey of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and later on July 10-11 two were discovered at a farm just south of Union Springs in Bullock County. Earlier in the year on March 28, a pair were found on so-called Red-cockaded Hill at Lake Purdy near Birmingham and were located again on July 25, with another being found on that date at the backwaters of Cox's Creek, principal tributary of that lake.

In addition, last year on July 6, while running a county bird survey in Marshall County, one was located in mountainous areas near Arab, then the only breeding season record since 1960 for the eastern half of the Tennessee Valley (see Imhof, Thomas A., "The Season, Summer-Fall, 1975," Alabama Birdlife (1975), 23(3-4):12). Further, in DeKalb County, a pair were found near Ft. Payne on May 16 of this year on the Lookout Mountain Spring Count. The number of these observations lends some encouragement to the thought that perhaps this species is making a come-back.

Bewick's Wren appears to respond well to Screech Owl tapes, which is a good help in discovering it since among its preferred habitats are brush piles and thickets, the pair found on Red-cockaded Hill this summer being in a thick growth of blooming bicolor lespedeza in an area with a number of fallen logs. Although the Choctaw and Bullock County observations were made without the aid of recorders, all of the others were.

The bird has a beautiful song resembling that of the Song Sparrow (see Imhof, Alabama Birds (1962):388). However, it is more often than not giving only call notes, which, while they do resemble the similar Carolina Wren, are different. Imhof describes them as a buzzing call of scolding quality. To the writer, they appear less varied and more nasal than the Carolina--perhaps appropriately being described as a cross between the Carolina and a Brown-headed Nuthatch.

As noted in all the guides, one of the conspicuous field marks is the white eye-line, but that is also present in the similar Carolina Wren. While the guides also note the white longitudinal spotting of the tail, the spots are not always visible unless the bird spreads its tail (see Bent, Arthur Cleveland, Life Histories of North American Birds, Bull. No. 195, U. S. Nat'l Museum (1948):176; Peterson, Roger Tory, A Field Guide to the Birds (1934), 2d Ed.:122). Therefore, the marks that one must look for to distinguish Bewick's from the Carolina Wren are its dark brown back contrasted with white underparts as opposed to the Carolina's russet brown back and buffy belly. Bewick's has a longer tail; consequently, the Carolina gives the picture of being a "chunkier" bird. Another feature of interest is that, while young Carolinas have lighter underparts than their parents, the young Bewick's has grayish or dusky tinges or marks on the breast (see Bent, supra:179). The writer has noted this on several of the summer observations, and the grayish marks appear rather clearly.

The above observations in Choctaw and DeKalb Counties were also by my wife Elberta and that in Bullock also by her and Lynn and Fritz Woehle.

It is certainly hoped that such a beneficial bird and beautiful songster as the Bewick's Wren will return to its former numbers in the Southeast, so observers might be on the watch in hopes of finding more evidence of its presence.

2616 Mountain Brook Parkway
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BANDER'S CORNER

James V. Peavy, Jr.

Banding this winter provided its usual share of interesting records. I banded my first Evening Grosbeaks this year at the home of Bob and Elberta Reid. These birds are always a pleasure to be around and help to brighten any winter's day. While at the Reid's, I also captured a Carolina Chickadee which was already wearing a band. I reported the band number and discovered that this bird had been banded seven years earlier by my friend and a former president of AOS, Michael Lee Bierly.

Other interesting birds banded this winter include a Grasshopper Sparrow at Courtland (winter records from the Tenn. Valley for this species are scarce) and White-crowned Sparrows at Courtland, Ballplay and Lakeland Farm.

This spring came complete with the usual excitement of returning summer birds, especially warblers. One of my most outstanding memories this year was provided by the White-eyed Vireo when Tom Imhof and I banded a combined total of over 100 on April 7 at Fort Morgan. (For other totals see the Season column in this issue.)

An interesting recovery of a Barn Swallow I banded occurred last spring. It would seem that a young man from Huntsville, Mr. Charles Droost, was following the progress of a Barred Owl nest when he discovered the tail-feathers and a leg of a bird in the nest. The leg had a band which he reported to the Fish and Wildlife Service. This band was placed by me on a Barn Swallow at Town Creek, Alabama--nearly 100 miles west of the Owl nest. I suppose we shall never know how a relatively agile, diurnal bird became food for the slow, nocturnal owl, but it probably reflects one of the many hazards of annual migration.

Here is an interesting series of recaptures I thought you might enjoy:
Catbird Band #821-34845 - banded by Peavy on 10-24-73
(All captures at Fort Morgan)

caught by Imhof on 11-06-74
caught by Peavy on 04-06-75
caught by Imhof on 04-25-75
caught by Peavy on 04-04-76
caught by Imhof on 04-09-76

Nothing like taking turns, is there?

5205 Beacon Drive
Birmingham 35210

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Treasurer's Report

6-13-75 thru 6-9-76

Checkbook Balance 6-13-75	334.28
Plus Deposits	<u>1,168.69</u>
	1,502.97
Less Disbursements	<u>790.40</u>
Checkbook Balance 6-9-76	<u>712.57</u>
Bank Statement Balance 6-9-76	<u>712.57</u>

Description of Disbursements

(Incurred prior to 6-13-75) Slide Collection, Door Prizes & Postage.	88.75
Postage.	133.98
Supplies, including AOS Stationery.	66.11
Supplies, Door Prizes, Motel for Speakers. AOS Meeting, Fall '75.	94.33
Supplies & Door Prizes AOS Meeting, Spring '76.	24.29
Typing <u>Alabama Birdlife</u> , Vol. 23, 1-2, 3-4.	85.50
Hallelujah Press, <u>Alabama Birdlife</u> , Vol. 23, 1-2, 3-4.	<u>297.44</u>
	<u>790.40</u>
Savings Account Balance.	<u>1,093.97</u>

* * * * *

The 1976 membership list for the AOS totals 156. If you have not paid your 1976 dues, please remit to the treasurer: Reg. \$4.00 - Sustaining \$5.00.

Juanita T. Goodson, Treas.
609 Bonniebrook Drive
Birmingham, Ala. 35226

- - - A N N O U N C I N G - - -

Alabama Ornithological Society

Fall Meeting

PLACE: Gulf Shores, Alabama

DATE: November 5, 6 & 7, 1976

REGISTRATION: begins 6:00 p.m. Friday, November 5
at Gulf Shores Holiday Inn

Come down and enjoy the Fall Migration on
Alabama's beautiful Gulf Coast with field
trips, banquet, programs, banding and good
fellowship.