

# ALABAMA BIRDLIFE



ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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1977 CHRISTMAS COUNTS REFLECT  
NORTHERN VISITORS AND HARSH WINTER OF 1976-77

Led by Bay County, Gulf Shores and Eufaula Wildlife Refuge, the 13 AOS Christmas Counts during the 1977 Christmas Season produced a record-breaking total of 207 species, including those seen within the respective count weeks, and a total of 203 on the counts themselves.

Northern Visitors--Notable in this the harshest winter on record in the AOS area were northern visitors, especially waterfowl. The counts made a "grand slam" in scoters--4 White-winged (all females), 3 on Lake Shelby at Gulf Shores for its second consecutive count record, and 1 within the count week at Choctawhatchee Bay ("Choc. Bay"); 2 Blacks, a female at Wheeler Wildlife Refuge for the first inland AOS record and another at Pensacola; and 2 Surfs, a female at Ft. Morgan and a male at Gulf Shores, each being second consecutive count records. The boat party at Choc. Bay reported a flock of 26 Oldsquaws for a NW Fla. Christmas Count record with another bird being found at Bay County. Inland, Com. (or Am.) Mergansers--3 at Wheeler Wildlife Refuge and 1 at Guntersville (all females)--were a prelude to a reasonably large invasion of the Tenn. Valley by this species after the record one of the previous winter.

Doubtless the most significant northern visitors, however, were the Snow Buntings. A pair appeared in Bay County around Thanksgiving, and the male was seen on the count and remained until March 10. Another bird, apparently also a male, was seen within the count week at Choc. Bay, which, in addition, featured an adult Great Black-backed Gull (thought probably to be the same bird that has been spending winters at the Destin East Pass for the last four years) and a Purple Sandpiper within its count week. A Short-eared Owl was recorded at Bay County and, as last Christmas, 1 at Eufaula Refuge and another within the Wheeler count week at Pryor Field north of Decatur.

Western Visitors--The most exciting visitor from the West was a Burrowing Owl at Gulf Shores bobbing up and down on the sand dunes near Mary Lou Slough for one of the few Ala. records. Inland, a Franklin's Gull, the "Prairie Dove" of the Great Plains, still in summer plumage with the rosy bloom on its breast quite visible, lingered in Decatur for the Wheeler Refuge count week. All but two of the Ala. records of this gull have been from the Tenn. Valley where this was the fifth. Bay County had 2 White-winged Doves within its count week; and the Lincoln's Sparrow, which might be considered a western visitor since it is much more common in the West than in the East, was recorded on the counts at Guntersville and Gulf Shores with another banded within the count week at Choc. Bay.

Effect of Harsh Winters--While the recent winter of 1977-78 was the coldest on record overall, there were more severe drops in temperature during the winter of 1976-77, and their effects probably were harder on the more fragile species of wildlife. Especially was the effect noted on small birds that are primarily insectivorous and have low body weights requiring high rates of metabolism. The group hardest hit appeared to be the kinglets, only 1 Golden-crowned being found on the eight Gulf Coast counts. A comparison

between the numbers recorded on the same 13 AOS Christmas Counts held in 1976 and 1977 (with the percentage using 1976 as a base) shows the following:

<u>Species</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Carolina Wren	760	539	71%
House Wren	138	97	70
Myrtle Warbler	10,872	6043	56
Eastern Phoebe	297	152	51
Pine Warbler	540	260	48
Solitary (or Blue-headed) Vireo	96	46	48
Hermit Thrush	293	121	41
Com. Yellowthroat	187	61	33
Golden-crowned Kinglet	364	116	32
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	2494	757	30
Orange-crowned Warbler	93	17	18

Many of these species, especially our resident Carolina Wren and Pine Warbler, had built up their populations during the three mild winters preceding the harsh weather of 1976-77. Consequently, some of the drop might be cyclical, as may well have been the case with the Orange-crowned Warbler, whose numbers on the 1976 counts had risen to a very high relative figure. Notwithstanding the harshness shown by the above figures, the 600 Myrtle Warblers at Eufaula Refuge was a 2d highest inland winter record. In addition, the Solitary Vireo did do well at Choc. Bay (13) and Marianna (8) as did the Hermit Thrush at Birmingham (40), although those are not count records.

By comparison, birds that do not rely so heavily on a diet of insects or are of larger size fared better, as indicated by the following (with the percentages being for the same 13 counts):

<u>Species</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Red-bellied Woodpecker	517	535	103%
Downy Woodpecker	261	262	100
Blue Jay	2319	2408	104
Carolina Chickadee	1161	1195	103
Tufted Titmouse	542	629	116
Brown-headed Nuthatch	450	424	94
Com. Mockingbird	1437	1355	94
Cardinal	2397	2551	106
Rufous-sided Towhee	1344	1117	83
White-throated Sparrow	6774	6111	90

Many of the last listed species were recorded in high numbers at Birmingham with AOS Christmas Count records being set by the Blue Jay (834--almost 100 over any previous Christmas Count), Com. Mockingbird (403) and Red-bellied Woodpecker (141) and with 2d AOS Christmas Count highs for the Cardinal (721), Tufted Titmouse (272) and Downy Woodpecker (102). Its Carolina Chickadees (459) were only four below the AOS Christmas Count record, and the chickadee further set a Coastal Plain record at Tuscaloosa (273). The Brown-headed Nuthatch did well with high numbers at Birmingham (154), Guntersville (59) and Eufaula Refuge (55), the last two being regional records. Also on the abundance side, Birmingham set AOS records for Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers (63) and Brown Creepers (22) and a 2d highest AOS record for White-breasted

Nuthatches (78). A Tenn. Valley record for Yellow-shafted Flickers was set by the 120 at Wheeler Refuge; but not all woodpeckers did well since the Hairy was recorded in lowest numbers in recent years, down almost 50% from 36 on the same 13 counts in 1976 to only 19 in 1977 (a decrease not attributed to the weather, however, but to a general decline in count areas).

Summer Residents and Migrants--Notwithstanding the harsh winter weather, there were a number of reports of summer residents and migrants remaining in the AOS area. Most noteworthy were the Northern Waterthrush, well-observed at close range at Eufaula Refuge for the first AOS Christmas Count record, and 3 Ovenbirds in Caverns State Park at Marianna following 1 on that count last year. Baltimore Orioles (currently considered a race of the Northern Oriole) were found inland at Eufaula Refuge (2) and at Marianna (1) where a female Blue Grosbeak was found at a feeder during the count week. Also in the category of summer finches was a small group of 6 Indigo Buntings at St. Andrew State Park on the Bay County count. Marianna missed its male Summer Tanager in this year's count week, but the bird is still maintaining winter residence in the area since it came to the same feeder on Dec. 23 and stayed until the middle of Jan.

Among summer residents that are rare to uncommon in winter on the Gulf Coast, the Black-and-White Warbler was seen on six counts, led by 6 birds at Marianna and including 1 inland at Eufaula Refuge for its third straight count record. The Yellow-throated Warbler was found on six coastal counts, with highs of 4 each at Marianna and Choc. Bay, as compared with four counts in 1976; but the White-eyed Vireo, also led by Marianna with 6, decreased from 31 on seven coastal counts in 1976 to 10 on four this year. The Green Heron was seen on or within the count week of four coastal counts with a high of 3 at Dauphin Island, its third straight count on which 3 birds have been recorded.

Endangered Species--Hopefully with the bans on DDT and other persistent pesticides, species high on food chains may be recovering from their previous low numbers. As some evidence in that direction, there were more Bald Eagles in the Tenn. Valley this winter than at any time since 1960. On the Gunter'sville count, 5 were recorded (1 adult and 4 immatures), and at Wheeler Refuge there were 2 immatures for its 9th straight year one or more have been seen there either on the counts or within the count periods. Farther south, 2 adults were at Eufaula Refuge, making a total of 9 birds on the AOS Christmas Counts as compared with a previous high of 3. Wheeler and Eufaula each also had a Peregrine Falcon; and there were three Ospreys--2 at Eufaula, and 1 at Gulf Shores. Brown Pelicans were found in a record AOS Christmas Count number at Bay County (99) and were also noted within the count weeks at Gulf Shores and Choc. Bay.

Hawks--Most hawks continue to be included on the "Blue List" of species not yet considered endangered but whose numbers are reported on the decline (American Birds (1977), 31(6):1087). However, in the AOS area the Sharp-shinned Hawk was again found in good numbers--32 birds on ten counts with an Ala. Christmas Count record of 6 at Wheeler Refuge followed by 5 at Eufaula Refuge and Marianna. The Cooper's Hawk did much better in 1977 than in recent years, being found on or within the count weeks of eight counts, a total of 11 birds with the high being 3 at Eufaula. This compares with a total of 5 birds in 1975 and only 3 on the 1976 counts. The Red-shouldered Hawk is included on the "Blue List" because of reports from other areas. Its total of 68 was less than the 102 on the same 13 counts in 1976, but that was still

the second highest AOS Christmas Count total on record. High numbers this year were at Birmingham (14) and Eufaula (13). The Red-tailed Hawk (not on the "Blue List") continued to do well with the 56 at Eufaula being the second highest AOS count record, and a dark Harlan's Hawk from the Plains States (now considered a race of the Red-tailed) was found at Dauphin Island.

Single immature Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks were reported at Ft. Morgan, the latter being a rare find for an eastern count and only the second known AOS Christmas Count record. The "Blue Listed" Merlin (or Pigeon Hawk) had a total of 7 birds on four counts--Gulf Shores (3, for the 5th time on its last six counts), Eufaula Refuge (2), and Wheeler Refuge and Dauphin Island (1 each), the previous high total for all counts being 4 in 1976. Although the Am. Kestrel (also on the "Blue List") is difficult to find during the breeding season in the AOS area, the 1977 Christmas Counts produced another high total led by Gulf Shores (50), Dauphin Island (38), and Wheeler (31--a Tenn. Valley record by one), and Eufaula (29).

Birds of the Shore and Marsh--Because of rapidly diminishing beach habitat, many shorebirds bear watching and, for example, both the Piping and Snowy Plovers are included on the "Blue List." However, the Piping, although found on only three counts, was recorded in its highest total of 55 birds (including 32 at Dauphin Island and 22 at Bay County). On the other hand, the Snowy (also considered an endangered species in Alabama) was counted on four counts in its lowest number (14) since 1973. There were no Wilson's, the last Christmas Count record having been one bird in 1969. The Am. Oystercatcher (also on the "Blue List") was again found at Dauphin Island (7 as last year), which is its highest Christmas Count record since 1971. Although not on the "Blue List" but a bird that could suffer from destruction of marsh habitat, the Virginia Rail was found on the 1977 counts in much lower numbers (a total of only 7) than in previous years.

On the abundance side, the most outstanding shorebird records were the Am. Avocets at the Alcoa ponds on Blakeley Island, Mobile (254--an AOS Christmas Count record) and the Spotted Sandpipers at Pensacola (29--an AOS winter record). Spotteds were also found on six other counts, including Gulf Shores (4), Bay County (3), and two inland records--Eufaula Refuge (2) and Birmingham (1, for its 5th count record since 1970). Mobile also had a Christmas Count record for Western Sandpipers (370) plus 2 Semipalmateds that were flushed and identified by calls. Bay County had a NW Fla. Christmas Count record for Westerns (130), an AOS count record for Willets (155), and the 2d highest AOS Christmas Count for Greater Yellowlegs (67). Black-bellied Plovers did well on most of the coastal counts, being led by Bay County (112--the highest AOS Christmas Count record since 1964) and Mobile (64), the total being almost 100 over the 1976 counts. Dauphin Island set an AOS abundance record for Red Knots (105) and a single bird was found at Bay County. Inland, the 41 Dunlins at Eufaula was a winter record by one.

In the wading bird category, notable inland was the Am. Egret at Wheeler Refuge (its 2d Christmas Count record). Reddish Egrets (2 on each count) were found at Dauphin Island (4th of its last five counts) and at Bay County (its 3d straight Christmas Count), and the Least Bittern at Gulf Shores was the 4th out of the last five years that species has been found on or within the count week there. Eufaula Refuge had the 2d highest AOS Christmas Count for Great Blue Herons (140), a tie for the AOS count record for Am. Bitterns (7), and

inland winter records for the Cattle Egret (13) and Little Blue Heron (7). Farther inland, another Little Blue was at Tuscaloosa; and Am. Bitterns were also found on the Gulf Shores count (2, for its 6th straight count record) while the Cattle Egrets there (41) were the 2d highest AOS Christmas Count.

Waterfowl--Reports of ducks were again diverse, and surface-feeders were still found in very low numbers on the coast. One exception was the Green-winged Teal, which again set a modern Christmas Count record at the Alcoa ponds at Mobile (606) and was found in record numbers for No. Ala. at Wheeler Refuge (382). Overall, the Lesser Scaup seems to have done the best by setting Christmas Count or near count records on four inland and four coastal counts--Dauphin Island (1525), Bay County (1321), Gulf Shores (1271), Pensacola (733), Eufaula Refuge (300), Wheeler Refuge (194), Guntersville (189) and Tuscaloosa (148). Also high on the coast were the Redhead and Bufflehead at Choc. Bay (2155 and 448, respectively, the latter an AOS count record) and at Bay County (1540 and 320, respectively). The Red-breasted Merganser was not only found in high numbers on the coast--Gulf Shores (691), Pensacola (534) and Dauphin Island (514)--but set an inland Christmas Count record at Wheeler (33). Other highs were the Black Duck at Wheeler (3159--a modern count record), the Ring-necked Duck there (633--2d highest AOS record in this decade), and the Gadwall at Guntersville (1017--an inland record excluding Wheeler). At Marianna, the 42 Wood Ducks were the highest AOS Christmas Count away from wildlife refuges.

Wintering Finches and Nuthatches--Southern invasions of boreal finches are cyclical, generally depending on food supply in the northern forests. The last and largest invasion of Evening Grosbeaks was in 1975; and now, two years later, those flashy birds are returning, having been seen on six Christmas Counts in 1977--1st count records at Eufaula Refuge (13) and Marianna (3), and 2d count records at Guntersville (13) and Wheeler (9). Both the Pine Siskin and Purple Finch did well, the former with Christmas Count or other high records on seven of ten counts led by Birmingham (203), Mobile (72) and Choc. Bay (65). The Purple Finch set an AOS Christmas Count record at Birmingham (466) and the 2d highest NW Fla. Christmas Count record at Bay County (60). The Am. Goldfinch did well also on most counts with the 3d highest AOS Christmas Count at Guntersville (599) and count records at Ft. Morgan (469) and Gulf Shores (391). The Red-breasted Nuthatch, which often accompanies an influx of boreal finches, set a record total for AOS counts (158) with the high figures being the AOS record at Birmingham (72) and a Christmas Count record at Gulf Shores (26). The cycle of invasions has been varying recently; but it should be more than two years, which offers prospects for a flight year again this coming winter.

Sparrows--Sparrows were generally low on the coast with the outstanding exception being the Savannah at Gulf Shores (752 for a Gulf Coast record by over 200). On the other hand, many abundance records were set inland. Especially was this true at Tuscaloosa for the White-crowned (273--an AOS Christmas count record, doubling the previous high last year at Marion), the Fox (83--2d highest AOS count), the Swamp (226) and Song (274), both count records. The Song Sparrow also did well at Eufaula Refuge (418) and Gulf Shores (181), while the White-crowned, which is never as numerous on the coast, set a Gulf Coast count record at Marianna (12). The Slate-colored Junco, now considered a race of the Northern or Dark-eyed Junco, did well as usual in Birmingham (over 1400 for the 2d highest AOS record, and 2 birds of the Pink-sided race were found at Guntersville. In addition, Birmingham set an AOS record for

Field Sparrows (736). In the category of the never-abundant grassland sparrows, a single Henslow's was found at the Gulf Coast Community College in Bay County--only the 3d AOS record for a Christmas Count or count period within the last decade--while Eufaula Refuge reported 3 LeConte's, and Gulf Shores 1 of that species plus 4 Grasshopper Sparrows.

Other Non-passerines--The most notable observations in this category were the Arctic Loon reported at Gulf Shores (the 2d AOS Christmas Count record following 1 in 1975 at Birmingham), a Red-throated Loon within the count week at Bay County, and a Chuck-will's-widow at Dauphin Island, there being few AOS Christmas Count records for any of these species. Sandwich Terns were found on four counts led by Bay County (5 at Shell Island) with others at Dauphin Island and Gulf Shores (3 each, the latter its 5th out of the last six count periods) and Mobile (1 at the Alcoa ponds). Single Eared Grebes were recorded at both Ft. Morgan and Gulf Shores.

On the abundance side, the over 1000 Bonaparte's Gulls at Gulf Shores was an Ala. Christmas Count record, and high numbers were also found at Bay County (695), Eufaula Refuge (130) and Guntersville (121--a No. Ala. abundance record). Ring-billed Gulls were recorded in high numbers at Bay County (over 1800) and at Mobile (over 1000), but this was down from the fantastic total of over 12,000 at Bay County last year. Similarly, Dauphin Island had over 1500 Laughing Gulls, which, however, was 3000 less than its count in 1976. Guntersville set an AOS abundance record for Pied-billed Grebes (311--an amazing 150 over any previous total) and inland count records for Horned Grebes (126) and Com. Loons (33).

Other non-passerine records in abundance included: Double-crested Cormorant--over 2000 at Dauphin Island (2d highest AOS record) and 658 at Bay County (a NW Fla. Christmas Count record); Am. Coot--high numbers of over 10,000 at Mobile and 8383 at Guntersville; Black Skimmer--500 at Dauphin Island (tying its AOS winter record set in 1975); Mourning Dove--1070 at Gulf Shores (a Gulf Coast Christmas Count record) and almost 800 at Pensacola (a NW Fla. Christmas Count record). The Belted Kingfisher continued to do well with highs on the Gulf Coast at Pensacola (47) and inland at Guntersville (21--a Tenn. Valley abundance record) and Birmingham (20).

Other Passerines--Over 9000 Am. Robins were found at Bay County; and, although the Eastern Bluebird was low on most counts, count records were set at Eufaula Refuge (71) and Guntersville (31). The 13 Sedge (or Short-billed Marsh) Wrens at Eufaula was the 2d highest inland record (although less than 25% of its incredible 1976 total). The Bewick's Wren is on the "Blue List;" and in 1977 Eufaula had the only one on the AOS counts, which is the lowest total for that species since 1972. At Dauphin Island, 1000 Brewer's Blackbirds was the 3d highest Gulf Coast Christmas Count; and inland, where not as common, they were closely observed through telescopes at Wheeler Refuge (65) and within the count week at Guntersville (a female and a probable 3 males), the farthest east they have been found in the Tenn. Valley. Other passerine abundance records included: Cedar Waxwing--over 1300 at Birmingham; Eastern Meadowlark--617 at Tuscaloosa; and Brown-headed Cowbird, which unfortunately seems to be appearing more and more in the South including the breeding season --over 2000 at Gulf Shores (highest Ala. Gulf Coast count).

Complete tabulations of all AOS Christmas Counts will appear in Vol. 32, No. 4 of American Birds. A summary of the 13 AOS counts is as follows:

<u>Count, Date and Compiler</u>	<u>Species (a)</u>		<u>Total Individuals</u>	<u>Partici- pants</u>	<u>Parties</u>	<u>Party- Hours</u>
	<u>On Count</u>	<u>Within Count Week</u>				
Wheeler Wildlife Refuge-- Dec. 17 (J. Milton Harris)	99	100	114,823	33	6	70
Guntersville--Dec. 23 (C. Dwight Cooley)	91	92	23,708	11 (b)	3	41
Birmingham--Dec. 26 (Thomas A. Imhof)	87	91	30,538	39 (b)	12	133.5
Tuscaloosa--Dec. 30 (Richard K. Crawford)	80	81	10,218	10 (b)	3	35
Eufaula Wildlife Refuge-- Dec. 26 (Sam Pate, Jr.)	135	135	43,769	33	16	61
Mobile--Dec. 31 (Richard E. Hayward, Jr.)	128	130	23,396	16	6	54
Dauphin Island--Dec. 17 (M. Wilson Gaillard)	119	121	13,052	19	7	61 (c)
Ft. Morgan--Dec. 26 (Mary Lou Mattis & Sherlie E. Gade)	90	90	5,811	16	4	38.5
Gulf Shores--Dec. 31 (P. Fairly Chandler)	139	144	46,933	25	8	88.5
Pensacola--Dec. 17 (Curtis L. Kingsbery)	102	107	10,910	32 (b)	10	97 (c)
Choctawhatchee Bay--Dec. 26 (Sandra Lefstad)	117	132	12,025	29	6	66 (c)
Marianna--Dec. 17 (Marion W. Gray)	98	104	8,430	17 (b)	7	63.5
Bay County (Panama City)-- Dec. 30 (Joe B. Harbison)	141	145	27,092	33 (b)	8	80.5 (c)

(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, juncos and the Harlan's Hawk.

(b) Additional observers at feeders.

(c) Includes boat party.

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## BLACK-HEADED GULL ON THE ALABAMA COAST

Thomas A. Imhof

On the clear morning of Thursday, March 30, 1978, at about 7:15, I was scanning the Gulf at Fort Morgan Beach with my 30x B&L spotting scope. About one-quarter mile to the west in perfect light were two large loosely-assembled flocks of Laughing and Bonaparte's Gulls. Almost immediately I spotted in the Laughing Gull flock a bird with Bonaparte's wing markings. This bird, it soon developed, had the same size, flight and feeding behavior of a Laughing Gull but did not dip daintily or flutter as does the Bonaparte's. Further it showed an all-white tail, dark but noticeably reddish bill and legs, and dark on the underside of the primaries as in the Caspian Tern. Behind the eye was a dark smudge. The bird was identified as a winter adult Black-headed Gull (Larus ridibundus)--ridibundus means laughing in Latin. The bird was followed with the 30x scope for at least five minutes in perfect light until lost in the crowd. Although several observers searched for the bird in the subsequent week, none looked early in the morning when the sun afforded perfect light on the thousands of gulls and terns that feed just east of the entrance to Mobile Bay. It was not seen again.

In Europe in 1944-45 I saw the Black-headed Gull many times and was impressed with its similarity in size and flight to a Laughing Gull. However, most American field guides liken it to a Bonaparte's, probably because it usually occurs with Bonaparte's on the North Atlantic Coast where Laughing Gulls seldom occur in flocks in winter. The Black-headed Gull has become increasingly common from Newfoundland to Maryland and even farther south on the Atlantic coast. With recent records on both coasts of Florida and even inland in Mississippi, it is to be expected on the northern Gulf coast. This record places the species only on the hypothetical list for Alabama. Those seeking to substantiate this record with further sight records or photographic evidence should read the field guides, especially the European ones, carefully as I did. Then, between November and April, its period of occurrence in Maryland, look for a Laughing Gull that has Bonaparte's wing markings.

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## BROWN PELICANS REPORTED AT EUFAULA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Brent Ortego

Prior to 1957, the Brown Pelican (Pelecanus occidentalis) was abundant during the whole year on the Alabama Gulf coast. It frequented all saltwater habitats and occasionally occurred inland over the coastal plains of Alabama after winter storms. From 1959 to 1963, no Brown Pelicans were reported in Alabama. In 1973, these birds were again observed in numbers higher than 100 (Imhof, 1976. Alabama Birds: 62).

During early November, 1977, a University of Georgia wildlife student reported that he observed a Brown Pelican flying low over the Chattahoochee River at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge. At first I was highly skeptical of this report because there has not been an inland sighting of this species

in Alabama since 1922 (Imhof, 1976). The student stated that he had observed Brown Pelicans along the Alabama coast before and was positive of his identification. His only description, "It looked like a Brown Pelican," was not very convincing. I made a special search of the refuge later that day but found no pelican. At that time, I passed off the observation as a misidentification of a Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias) which sometimes has a silhouette similar to a pelican.

In late March, 1978, I heard second-hand that Brown Pelicans were sighted at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge by a former Auburn University student. She was an experienced observer, but I have not been able to contact her since then to get her details. I was at the refuge while her observations were made, but, even though I had searched all suitable habitats for waterbirds, I did not observe any pelicans.

During April 15, 1978, I had searched most of Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge for Canada Goose (Branta canadensis) nests without sighting any pelicans and was returning to the boat dock at 5:00 p.m. when I observed an immature Brown Pelican gliding N 10 meters over the Chattahoochee River from an area previously searched. The less than 1-meter long bird had a brown neck, back and wings with a white belly. The large dark beak was less than 3 decimeters long with a blunt slightly hooked tip. No feet were observed extending beyond the tail. The neck was retracted with the head held above the plane of the body and the beak pointing noticeably downward. The bird turned near the refuge boat dock and landed in one of the open sloughs adjacent to the river. It swam in the area for an hour and departed in a southerly direction.

It is possible that the first two sightings were correct, even though I do not have access to any satisfactory details. The observers have had experience at identifying this species, and a Brown Pelican would be hard to misidentify.

If the other Brown Pelicans reported behaved in a similar manner to the one I observed, it explains why I did not observe them. It requires me 10 hours to search all of ENWR by boat. If a large water bird is at one place on the refuge for an hour or less during one of my surveys, I might easily miss it. If a large bird flies low north or south through the refuge, it would probably pass by me and be observed on most occasions.

During the days of the reported pelican sightings, there were 24 - 40-kilometer/hour NW winds which would seemingly discourage 160-kilometer northward movements by coastal birds. Each observation occurred two to three days after statewide thunderstorm activity. It is possible that the storms initiated abnormal trips by the Brown Pelicans, and that the birds remained inland for several days until they got reoriented as to the location of the coast.

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## RUFFED GROUSE IN NORTHWEST ALABAMA

Jerome A. Jackson, Bette J. Schardien  
and Patricia Ramey

On February 12, 1978, at about 4:00 p.m., we flushed two Ruffed Grouse (Bonasa umbellus) from corn stubble in northeastern Tuscaloosa County, north of Little Tyro Creek and west of Sandtown (Section 5, Township 17 S, Range 9 W). The field in which the birds were foraging was about two acres in size and was nearly half a mile from the nearest public road. The field was completely surrounded by second growth pines (Pinus virginiana and P. taeda) and was on a ridge in very steep terrain.

Imhof (1976, Alabama Birds, University of Alabama Press, University) considers the Ruffed Grouse rare in northeast Alabama and mentions that 65 Ohio birds were released in the Bankhead National Forest in 1958. The species was last reported in northwest Alabama near Borden Creek and Bee Branch (Winston County) by Walter Coxe in 1972 and 1973, respectively (Imhof, op. cit.). To our knowledge, the species has not previously been reported as far south as Tuscaloosa County.

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## ANNOTATED CHECKLIST OF GEORGIA BIRDS

J. Fred Denton, W. Wilson Baker,  
Leslie B. Davenport, Jr., Milton N. Hopkins, Jr.,  
Chandler S. Robbins. 60 pp \$2.00

### A REVIEW

As the title implies, this is a listing of the 351 species of birds which make up the official state list of Georgia. Each bird is listed by common and technical name, and its status by region and season is briefly summarized. There is also a map showing the major physiographic regions of Georgia and a brief introduction.

I recommend this book to anyone interested in the variety and distribution of birds in the South. It is especially enjoyable to compare the similarities and differences between Alabama and Georgia birds. There are some real surprises in store for anyone who takes the time to do so. As only one side of each page is printed, this little book just begs to be taken into the field and to be used to keep up with local records. Books may be ordered from:

Georgia Ornithological Society  
755 Ellsworth Drive NW  
Atlanta, GA 30318

1977 FALL SHOREBIRD SURVEY OF SWAN CREEK MANAGEMENT AREA  
DECATUR, ALABAMA

Dennis Mark Brown

This survey is being done in cooperation with the International Shorebird Survey conducted by Manomet Bird Observatory in Manomet, Massachusetts.

Purpose

To prove that a small number of "stopover" areas will support a very large number of migratory shorebirds and to determine what habitat changes occur in these areas.

Sandpipers and plovers gather in almost unbelievable numbers at favored sites. While visiting these areas, the shorebirds feed and fatten in preparation for their upcoming transatlantic flight. The main concern is that the welfare of several North American shorebird species is increasingly threatened by habitat changes in these migratory stopover areas. There is concern that change of shorebird habitat does not allow the birds to prepare properly for their rigorous migration routes and that this lack of preparation is causing a higher migration fatality rate.

Methods

The survey area was usually visited every two to seven days and date and time of each visit was recorded. For census accuracy, all numbers recorded are counts, except those which are underlined. All underlined numbers are "guesstimates," i.e., an educated guess. For accuracy of species identification, only birds that were individually identified were recorded as a specific species. For example, in a flock of 100 Semipalmated Sandpipers, it is very possible that 1 or 2 Western Sandpipers could be overlooked. Therefore, if only 50 of the birds were identified as Semipalmateds, even if all appeared to be, they were recorded as 50 Semipalmated and 50 peep species. This applies mainly to peeps and dowitchers. All dowitchers were identified by call.

Results

A large number of shorebirds do use Swan Creek Management Area as a migratory stopover, and habitat changes detrimental to shorebirds do occur. The July 1 through Sept. 7 portion of the survey was done of the Dewatering Area of Swan Creek. The Sept. 25 through Nov. 30 portion was done along the shore of the Tennessee River in the Swan Creek Management Area. During the period of Sept. 8 through Sept. 24, while the Dewatering Area was being flooded and the Tennessee River was being lowered, there was no significant shorebird habitat available and no shorebirds were seen!

On October 28 the mudflats along the Tennessee River were flooded due to excessive rain, and no shorebirds were seen. During the Nov. 9 through Nov. 30 period, the gates of Swan Creek were locked to protect incoming waterfowl, thus the mudflats were inaccessible. However, the month of November produced a record rainfall by over six inches, and it is fairly safe to assume that the mudflats were flooded during most of this period. With the opening of duck hunting season, so came the opening of the gates on Dec. 5, and the winter portion of the survey was resumed.

Date Time	July							August					
	1 7am	4 6pm	6 6pm	11 6pm	18 5pm	20 6pm	24 4pm	5 5pm	10 9am	13 10am	15 1pm	18 11am	19 9am
Semipal Plover								3	1	4	5	7	7
Killdeer	<u>32</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>10</u>
Am. Golden Plover													
Black-bel Plover													
Common Snipe		2	3										1
Spotted Sandp		2	1	4	<u>10</u>	3	2	5	1	1	2	1	2
Solitary Sandp	4		1		2	2	3						
Willet		1											
Gr Yellowlegs	1	1		1	<u>18</u>	8	12		<u>10</u>	<u>12</u>	7	12	10
L Yellowlegs	1	1			<u>9</u>	3	5	9	5	5	2	6	4
Pect Sandpiper					<u>16</u>	5	<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>30</u>
White-r Sandp				2									
Least Sandpiper	4	9	12	14	38	21	17	12	45	20	12	20	28
Dunlin													
Sh-b Dowitcher	2	1					3				10	1	5
Long-b Dowitcher				2							1		
Stilt Sandpiper					4					10		6	9
Semipal Sandp		5					7		3	1	7	12	21
Western Sandp						5			1	2			7
Buff-br Sandp													
Sanderling													
Am Avocet													10
Wilson's Phalar									2	2	1	2	2
Phalarope sp.													
Peep species				<u>25</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>80</u>
Dowitcher sp.			2	1	4	5			4	4			

Observations were also made on 9/10, 9/17, 10/28, 11/9 and 11/12 but no birds were found.

2013 Park Street SE  
Decatur 35601

September						October						Nov.			
22 1pm	28 6am	31 5pm	3 9am	5 9am	7 3pm	25 10am	1 9am	2 4pm	9 3pm	14 3pm	15 7am	19 4pm	22 12n	23 3pm	5 2pm
3	11	<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>10</u>	1										
<u>10</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	5	9		12	8	10	<u>20</u>	7	<u>10</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>40</u>
									17		3	3			
	1									2	4	6	8		10
						1			5	2		<u>30</u>	5		
2	1		1	1	1	1					1				
7	13	21	18	21	15	25		12	7	15	12	12	7	1	11
1	8	25	7	17	12				5		4	10	1		
<u>30</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>30</u>	15				3	1	1		10	10	3
		3	5	2											
10	18	32	21	35	18				53	161	122	216	98	32	89
									1		3	<u>30</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>40</u>
						1							4	2	
	5	13	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	1				4		1	1	2		
17	12	47	35	42	22		1		1		1	5	7	10	16
		3	8	3	9	3									
	7	3		3											
		1	5	3							1				
2	3	2	2	3	2										
	1	1													
<u>20</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>140</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>80</u>					<u>150</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>25</u>
	4	15	7	6	22										

### Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who tolerated all the mud, insects and extreme heat to accompany me on surveying trips. Special thanks to Ann Miller of Birmingham whose company on many such trips and expertise in shorebird identification was invaluable.

## BRIDLED TERN AND AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER IN ALABAMA

Charles D. Duncan

This account reports the second and third records of Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*) and the first and second records of Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) in Alabama.

On the 11th of June, 1978, a party consisting of Howard Einspahr, Ralph Havard, Paul Johnson, Phillip Kilpatrick and the author were birding approximately 50 kilometers south of Sand Island Light in a 23-foot boat fitted with twin 140-hp engines. The weather was fair, seas very calm and visibility above 20 km with virtually no haze.

At about 2 p.m. as we were cruising generally westward along the smooth water of a diatom slick, we saw a Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). Before we could complete our observations of this bird, a storm-petrel was seen. We changed course and gave chase until we could positively identify it as a Wilson's (*Oceanites oceanicus*). Less than ten minutes after returning to the jaeger, we saw an unusual tern and again gave chase. The bird was soon joined by a second tern. Both were identified as Bridled Terns on the basis of the following characteristics: Direct size comparison showed them to be much larger than Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*). Moreover, the wings and mantle were dark gray-brown (not black). A dark line projected from the bill through the eye, and the white of the forehead extended behind the eye. A white collar circled the neck behind the black cap.

Havard found two more Bridled Terns off Orange Beach at the 100-fathom curve (some 100 km from the first sighting) on July 22, 1978. All four birds were apparently quite healthy and were probably not storm-driven into these waters.

The only previous record of Bridled Tern in Alabama is one from September, 1932, when six were seen and a specimen found at Gulf Shores immediately after a hurricane. (Imhof, T.A., 1976, Alabama Birds, 2nd ed., University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa: 214).

On June 30, 1978, Havard, Kilpatrick and the author were foiled in an attempt to return to the area off Sand Island Light described above because of thunder squalls off the entire Alabama coast. Instead, we cruised in the sheltered waters between Dauphin and Sand Islands. At about 10 a.m. under an overcast sky, we saw a small shearwater, scarcely larger than the Black Terns and noticeably smaller than the Laughing Gulls (*Larus altricilla*) both of which were nearby. We chased this bird, approaching it sometimes to within 10 meters.

Our identification of the bird as Audubon's Shearwater is based on the entirely dark back (no white on the upper tail coverts) which in the color slide is seen to contain some dark brown (eliminating Little Shearwater, *Puffinus assimilis*), size, dark vent and white lower half of the lores (eliminating Manx Shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus*). We also noted the white mark behind the eye ("ear patch?", "suggestion of a white collar?") which is depicted but undescribed in the standard field guides for Audubon's but not Manx Shearwater. We are uncertain if this is a reliable mark.

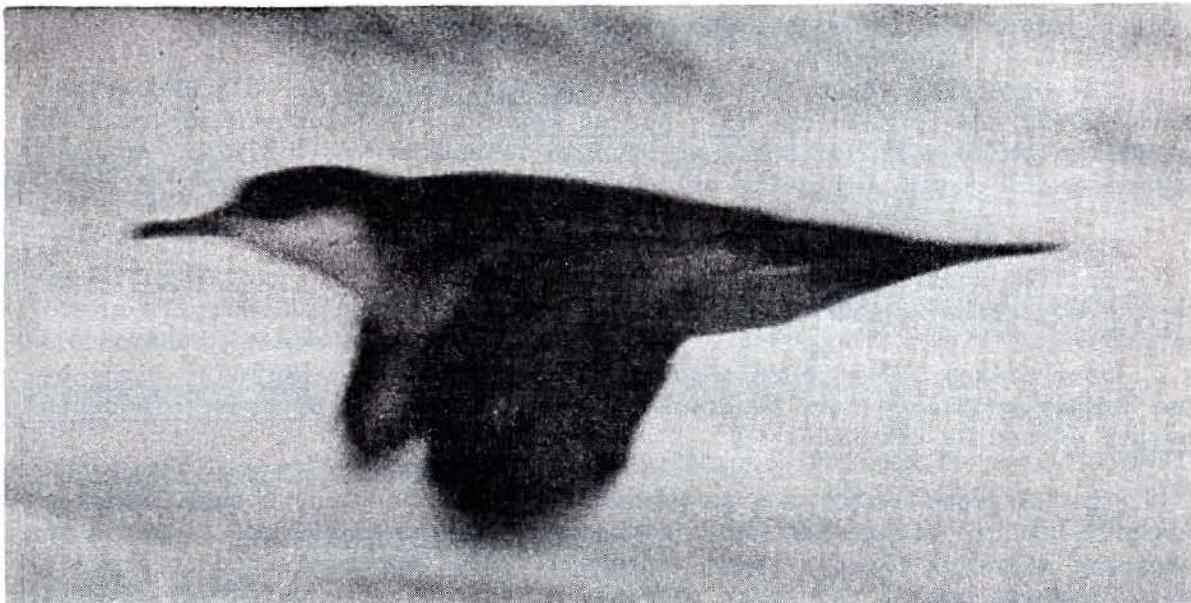
Audubon's Shearwater, while previously unrecorded in Alabama, has recently been found in July and September off Northwest Florida and in winter off the Texas coast.

Acknowledgments: It is a pleasure to thank Howard Einspahr and Ralph Havard for their assistance in the preparation of this report.

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Birmingham 35294



Bridled Tern



Audubon's Shearwater

Photos from color slides by the author

## AOS - 1978 SPRING MEETING

We had a good time at the AOS spring meeting on Dauphin Island. On Friday night, Mike Dardeath, who has participated in the study with Paul Johnson, presented the Cat Island Heronry Study illustrated with color slides. Cat Island is a most important nesting place for herons and egrets with an estimated three to four thousand birds having nested there in 1977.

On Saturday, field trips went to the Shell Mounds and Audubon Sanctuary (Bob Reid and Jim Thompson - leaders), to the Airport and West End (Fairly Chandler and Ralph Havard - leaders) and to Blakeley Island in the Mobile Delta (John Winn - leader). An Upland Sandpiper, American Avocet, and colonies of Black-necked Stilts, Gull-billed Terns and Caspian Terns highlighted the Blakeley Island trip. Painted Bunting, Gray Kingbird, Swainson's Warbler, Whimbrels, Stilt Sandpiper, Reddish Egret, 3 Swallow-tailed Kites and an American Alligator were among the species seen on Dauphin Island (including Cedar Point).

Attending the Directors Meeting were Russell Bailey, Fairly Chandler, Bob Duncan, Curtis Kingsbery, Eric Lefstad, Bob Reid and Jim Thompson. The Directors asked the AOS Slide Committee (Bob Reid, Chairman; Helen Kittinger, Custodian) to proceed with plans to sell for educational purposes only entire sets to interested subscribers, with the charges providing for the cost of the slides, for expenses of the photographer and for a modest profit for AOS. The Directors also unanimously approved two resolutions:

1. Resolution supporting inclusion of West Dauphin Island in Gulf Islands National Seashore.
2. Resolution supporting preservation of Little Dauphin Island as Barrier Island Resource.

Each of these resolutions were later unanimously adopted by the Society at the business meeting at the Dauphin Island Community Center.

The Directors voted to hold the 1978 Fall Meeting at Gulf Shores on October 20-22 and to hold the 1979 Spring Meeting - a joint meeting with the Florida Ornithological Society - at Dauphin Island on April 27-29. At the business meeting, the following officers were elected:

Dr. James C. Thompson, President  
Dr. Tom Rogers, Vice President  
Mrs. Martha Rogers, Treasurer

Door prizes were a portfolio of bird pictures, the World of Birds by James Fisher and Roger Tory Peterson and The Pleasure of Birds - An Audubon Treasury edited by Les Line.

The Saturday night program was presented by Dr. Judy Stout, Assistant Director, Dauphin Island Sea Lab. Alabama's Tideland Resources concerns the tremendous value of the tidelands and the vitally important need to protect them. This was one of the first showings of this program which was developed by the League of Women Voters and financed by a grant from the Office of Coastal Zone Management.

Come to the next meeting!



ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

TREASURER'S REPORT

6-13-77 thru 6-12-78

Checkbook Balance 6-13-77	\$ 565.71
Plus Deposits	<u>2299.73</u>
	\$2865.44
Less Disbursements	<u>1610.25</u>

Checkbook Balance 6-12-78	\$1255.19
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Description of Disbursements

Postage	\$ 135.11
Typing <u>Alabama Birdlife</u> , Vol 25, 1-2, 3-4	85.50
Xeroxing	4.00
Hallelujah Press, <u>Alabama Birdlife</u> , Vol 25, 1-2, 3-4	265.20
Supplies	36.93
Refunds to members for overpayment of dues and cancellations of trips	23.00
1977 Spring Banquet Speaker	50.00
Expenses, Fall Banquet, 1977	488.17
Expenses, Spring Banquet, 1978	<u>522.34</u>
TOTAL	\$1610.25

SAVINGS ACCOUNT BALANCE	\$1195.56
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Membership dues for 1978 should be sent to the treasurer: Martha Rogers  
2708 43rd Ave.E.  
Tuscaloosa, AL  
35401