

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE



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NEW BANDING RECORD FOR PEREGRINE FALCONS IN ALABAMA

Jimmie R. Parrish and E. William Wischusen

During the month of October 1979 we operated a raptor banding station on the Alabama Gulf Coast between Gulf Shores, AL, and Fort Morgan, AL, near the mouth of Mobile Bay. At this site, observation was facilitated for both the Gulf coast line and the bay area. The wind velocity and direction were noted for each day of observation, as well as the temperature. The highest temperature for any one day was 86° F and a low one morning of 59° F. Average daily temperature for observation time was 79.6° F. We recorded a total of 63 man-hours of observations. This includes 50 hours total time spent attempting to trap and band raptors. The stated man-hours are the result of approximately six days banding/observation time over a two-week period from 6 - 21 October. The approximation comes from the fact that on 6 October we were not actually operating the station until just past 1400. Observations were made, however, starting at 0800 the same day, with the morning and noon hours being spent preparing the area for operation. The station was manned and operated from 0700 to 1800 on 5 of the 6 days. There was a total of 391 raptor sightings, representing 10 species. The most abundant species was the Broad-winged Hawk (Buteo platypterus) comprising 203 of the total. The more consistent American Kestrel (Falco sparverius) was second at 103 sightings. The maximum number of sightings of Broad-winged Hawks was 112 on 7 October. The maximum number of Kestrel sightings during the period was 29 on 21 October. On 13 October 84 Broad-winged Hawks were sighted, including one count of a 60 member kettle. Other actual counts of Broad-winged Hawk kettles were made, this being the largest.

The primary objective of this banding operation was to assess the movements of the endangered Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus subsp.) along the

Alabama Gulf Coast during its autumnal migration to Central and South America. A total of 9 Peregrines was observed, 8 hatching year birds, and 1 adult. Of the 6 Peregrines that came into the station, 4 were captured, banded and released. This marks the first banding of this species recorded for Alabama. The maximum number of Peregrines sighted was 7 on 13 October. This is almost a week in advance of previous peak sightings and represents over twice the number of most recent peak sightings (Imhof, 1976). At least three of the individuals that were banded were judged to belong to the tundrius subspecies and one to the anatum subspecies. An ongoing banding program along the eastern flyway for the past ten years has shown an increase in the numbers of Peregrines sighted and over 500 have been banded during this same time frame. These sightings indicate an upward trend in the status of the two subspecies which have been considered to be most seriously endangered. Falco peregrinus anatum is not normally known to be so highly migratory as Falco peregrinus tundrius, but the former has been recorded at other stations along the eastern flyway (Ward, pers. com.). Banded were two hatching year females and two hatching year males. One male was classified as belonging to the anatum subspecies. The crown and head to the nape were dark brown. The top of the crown was a bit lighter but not very much. The characteristic malar stripe was much darker than the rest of the head, and was very wide. The entire body coloration was darker than other individuals trapped. The breast was heavily barred and washed throughout with a reddish tint. Heavy barring occurred over the entire breast and throat right up to the lower mandible. The cere was pale blue, as well as the area around the eye. The feet were a "faded" blue color with a slight yellow color seen intermittently in the toes.

In the immature plumage, F. p. anatum has the broad facial bar that in all plummages marks the species, but the crown is brown, as is the entire dorsal surface. The entire pale, reddish brown

ventral surface is streaked with dark sepia, darker than the brown of the dorsal surface. Cere and eyelid are bluish-grey; eye, dark brown; feet vary with different individuals from bluish-grey or greyish-white to pale yellow. F. p. tundrius averages smaller than F. p. anatum and is generally paler and greyer, especially in the first year plummage. The facial bar, in F. p. tundrius in all plummages, is narrow and often separated from the crown by a narrow line of white feathers under the eye. Immatures are sandy-brown above, the crown often pale greyish rather than dark, giving them a blond-headed appearance. Two ocelli are present on the nape in 50 per cent or more of first-year birds of this subspecies. Dorsal feather edges in first-year plummage are broad pale buff. Ventrally, immatures are nearly white with a pale rufous overwash, narrowly streaked with dark brown (Beebe, 1974). This resemblance is to first year Prairie Falcons (Falco mexicanus).

Currently, plans are underway to operate a similar station at this site in 1980 during a consecutive 25 day period. Banding operations will be conducted in conjunction with other stations along the eastern flyway and will hopefully provide some further insight into the migratory route taken by these fabulous birds during their fall trek to the south.

In addition to the sightings previously mentioned, there were others as follows: Cooper's Hawk (Accipiter cooperii) 8; Sharp-shinned Hawk (Accipiter striatus) 17; Red-tailed Hawk (Buteo jamaicensis) 1; Marsh Hawk (Circus cyaneus) 42; Osprey (Pandion haliaetus) 4; Merlin (Falco columbarius) 2; one unidentified falcon and one unidentified Buteo.

We made a preliminary visit to the area on 1 September and at that time observed 1 Osprey and 1 immature Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus). The initial choice of location for the station was changed due to the damage resulting from hurricane Frederick. A surprisingly small number of Peregrines was noted

during observation time and may or may not be correlated to this same damage. Much of the vegetation appeared to be in good shape, only pine showing obvious signs of damage. The marsh areas and beaches, however, were significantly altered. It is felt that for all practical purposes, the height of the migration through this area had taken place by 21 October. On both 20 and 21 October counts were very low and the high point of this weekend was two American Kestrels which appeared throughout the day chasing each other. One individual was showing signs of becoming territorial during these last two days of observation.

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HOUSE FINCHES OBSERVED NEAR ANNISTON, ALABAMA

C. W. Summerour

A flock of House Finches (Carpodacus mexicanus) was observed by the author about 3 miles (4.8 km) north of Anniston on December 15, 1979, in a weedy field immediately north of Food World on Highway 21 and across from the Baker Gate entrance to Ft. McClellan. Thirty-three birds were counted and pictures were taken to verify the record.

On January 15, 1980, a total count of 41 birds was recorded, but shortly afterward the flock was joined by still others, increasing the number to an estimated 75-100 birds. The main attraction for this concentration was the abundance and availability of certain food items, particularly giant ragweed (Ambrosia trifida), small ragweed (Ambrosia artemisiifolia), and the berries of privet (Ligustrum sinense) which the birds descended upon in the swarming fashion of Cedar Waxwings (Bombycilla cedrorum). Cardinals (Richmondia cardinalis), Rufus-sided Towhees (Pipilo erythrophthalmus), Red-winged Blackbirds (Agelaius phoeniceus), Song Sparrows (Melospiza melodia), Swamp Sparrows (Melospiza georgiana), Field Sparrows (Spizello pusilla), White-throated Sparrows (Zonotrichia albicollis), and Fox Sparrows (Passerella iliaca) were also abundant in the field. This concentration of small birds attracted a Sharp-shinned Hawk (Accipiter striatus) which frequented the area and on one occasion was observed flushing and pursuing the House Finches.

The first reported occurrence of House Finches in Alabama was 5 birds observed on January 2, 1972, on the Birmingham Christmas Count (Imhof, 1976). The second occurrence was 9 months later on September 16, 1972, of a single bird seen by G.B. and G.C. Carlisle, also of Birmingham. Five years later a female turned up at Mark Brown's feeder in Decatur from January 27

through March 16, 1977. This bird was also photographed, thereby removing the species from the hypothetical list in Alabama. On March 5, 1978, Imhof recorded a male at his feeder in Birmingham.

In 1979, the frequency of House Finches in the State began to increase. Paul Kittle recorded a bird at Florence on January 26 and 27. On November 17, a female or immature was photographed by Roy Lowe in Decatur. A male was reported at the Birmingham Zoo by Buzz Peavy and was seen there from December 13 through at least the end of the year. The flock reported in this article was first seen on December 15, and is still there at this writing (February 1, 1980). The latest report comes from Birmingham where Imhof observed 6, all females or immatures, at Robert's Field on December 29.

The number of observations within the past year suggest that the House Finch may be expected to turn up with increasing frequency in Alabama and may possibly move into the area as a breeding resident within the next several years.

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LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE TAKES PREY FROM FLOODWATER

Mark S. Siegel

The rains of the week of 8 April 1979 brought the level of the Black Warrior River in Alabama to record levels. In the Demopolis-Greenesboro area, the river crested at more than 7 m above flood stage, covering much of the surrounding areas with water. On 13 April 1979, I witnessed a Loggerhead Shrike (Lanius ludovicianus) taking prey from this floodwater. This occurred approximately 4.7 km N of Greensboro, Alabama, in Hale County. At 0743, a Shrike was perched on a phone line 3 m above the water beside Alabama Highway 69. The Shrike dropped to the water creating a small splash, captured an insect approximately 2 cm in length, and immediately returned to the line.

According to Judd (1898. Food of Shrikes. Cuckoos and Shrikes in their relation to agriculture. U.S. Dept. Agr., Div. Biol. Surv., Bull. 9:15-26.), minnows made up the entire stomach contents of a Shrike in the Winter in Utah. However, there is no record in the literature of an actual observation of a Shrike taking prey from water. This behavior may have been a response to the flooding of most of the surrounding land, the Shrike's normal foraging area.

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NESTING OF THE SOLITARY VIREO IN THE
TALLADEGA NATIONAL FOREST

C. W. Summerour

The Solitary Vireo (Vireo solitarius) occurs as a migrant throughout Alabama and as a winter resident in the southern half of the State and rarely but regularly in the northern half (Imhof, 1976). Several May and June records in the Tennessee Valley and Mountain Region have suggested that the species might breed in the State. The discovery by the author of a nesting pair of Solitary Vireos, several bonded pairs and numerous singing males in the Talladega National Forest in Cleburne County confirms the species as a breeding bird in Alabama.

On March 25, 1979, while in the Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area, my attention was drawn to the persistent singing of a Solitary Vireo. I observed the singer for about 30 minutes and concluded that the bird was on territory. On March 27 I returned to the area and found the male and female beginning construction on a nest 20 feet high in a small, 6 inch understory southern red oak (Quercus falcata) growing on the upper slope of a mixed pine hardwood hillside that dropped off steeply into a hardwood bottom. At this time the nest consisted of only a few plant fibers suspended from a fork in a small horizontal limb about 2 feet from the main stem of the tree. I would judge nest construction to have begun no more than 1 day before, on March 26.

The male made 2 trips alone to the nest carrying nesting material and 1 trip accompanied by the female. On all 3 trips he approached the nesting site chattering and sang frequently while working on the nest.

On March 29 both the male and female were busy at work on the nest. By this time the cup had taken shape but holes could be seen through the nest from

below. The pair made 6 to 8 trips over a 15 minute period and the male usually approached the nest chattering and would sing at the nest. While one member of the pair worked on the nest, the other would often gather material from nearby branches.

Five days later, on April 3, the nest appeared completed and there was no activity around the nest, although the male sang frequently in the vicinity. Assuming nest construction to have begun on or near March 26, nest construction required 12 days or less.

On April 6, the female was sitting on the nest and appeared to be incubating. After 10 minutes, she left the nest and joined the male on a branch about 15 feet away. He immediately moved up within 2 or 3 inches of her, stood full length on the limb, crest erect, and bobbed from side to side singing and chattering. This brief courtship display was immediately followed by copulation, and singing was almost continuous before and during mating. Following copulation the female left and did not return. Interestingly, another male suddenly appeared, fought briefly with the resident male, then left.

On April 24 the female was on the nest, presumably incubating or by this time brooding young. I was unable to make a follow up trip to check on the progress of the young.

As it turned out, the Solitary Vireo was a common bird in March and April in the Talladega National Forest from Cheaha Mountain north to the Choccolocco Wildlife Management area, and probably occurs as a breeding resident south from Cheaha. Territorial males were common to abundant in hardwood and mixed pine-hardwood habitats in both remote areas and near main woodland roads. How the species has been overlooked so long is somewhat of a mystery.

The Solitary Vireo is an early nester when the woods are still wintry and bare. Singing is at a peak during March and April and occurs even on icy mornings when the temperature is in the upper 20s and the spring woods stilled by the cold. Closer observation in early spring might reveal the Solitary Vireo to be a common breeding bird in the mountainous areas of the State.

Summary

The Solitary Vireo is a common breeding resident in the Talladega National Forest from Cheaha Mountain north of the Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area, but the species probably breeds in other hardwood and mixed pine-hardwood areas in north Alabama and possibly further south.

A nesting pair observed by the author in the Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area confirms the species as a breeding bird in Alabama.

Nest construction began on March 26 or 27 and required 12 days or less. The female appeared to be incubating on April 6 when copulation was also observed. She was last observed on the nest on April 24, presumably incubating or brooding young.

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Imhof, T. A. 1976. Alabama Birds, 2nd ed. State of Alabama Department of Conservation, University of Alabama Press.

VISITORS FROM NORTH, SOUTH, AND WEST FEATURED
ON 1978 CHRISTMAS COUNTS

Robert R. Reid, Jr.

Visitors from other areas produced the most exciting observations on the 13 Alabama Ornithological Society (AOS) Christmas Counts ("CBC's") conducted during the 1978 Christmas Season, the same number and same counts as in 1977. However, from a quantitative standpoint, many low species totals were reported. A number were doubtless due to the effect of the two preceding harsh winters; and others reflected the inconsistent weather, counts conducted in the last portion of the count period generally having many more low totals.

Notable Visitors--The rarest visitor on the AOS CBC's was the Sooty Shearwater (Puffinus griseus) at Ft. Morgan, Alabama where a single bird, showing silvery underwing linings and a stiff-winged flight, was noted off the end of the peninsula. This shearwater breeds in the Antarctic around New Zealand and Cape Horne and, thus, should be "at home" in December during the Antarctic summer. There have, however, been 2 January records (one a partial specimen) from the Pensacola, Florida area. This was the second record for Alabama, the other being inland in the spring of 1898 after a heavy storm.

From the West, an Ash-throated Flycatcher (Myiarchus cinerascens) was found at the Cottondale Sewage Treatment Ponds on the Marianna, Florida CBC and a Grooved-billed Ani (Coccyzus erythrophthalmus) within the count week at Dauphin Island. There have been a few observations of Ash-throated Flycatchers in the AOS area outside of the breeding season, but this is the first CBC record. The ani could well have been the same bird found at the Dauphin Island Shell Mounds earlier on October 7-8, 1978, which constituted the third Alabama record. For some discussion of field

marks of the anis, see the article on the 1975 Christmas Counts in Alabama Birdlife (1976), 24(1-2):3. Notable also was the Yellow-throated Vireo (Vireo flavifrons) at Pensacola, Florida which was the second NW Fla. CBC record and the third for the AOS area. Magnificent Frigatebirds (Fregata magnificens), which are indeed rare here in winter, appeared this year on two CBC's--a male at Dauphin Island and an immature at Gulf Shores, Alabama.

From the North, the 2 Lapland Longspurs (Calcar-
ius lapponicus) on the outer beach at the Destin East Pass on the Choctawhatchee Bay, Florida ("Choc. Bay") CBC were the second record for NW Fla. and the first on its CBC's. There were at least 3 of these birds seen during mid-winter, first discovered on December 17 and remaining until at least January 6, 1979. Farther north, 61 such longspurs (an AOS CBC record) were found on the mudflats of Beulah Bay on the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge CBC. Also at Wheeler during the winter of 1978-79 there were 47 Whistling Swans (Olor columbianus) the most ever seen in Alabama. Other particularly northern waterfowl were the AOS record number of 11 Common Scoters (Oidemia nigra) at Dauphin Island with a female being seen at Gulf Shores and 4 unidentified scoters at Ft. Morgan.

A female Ruby-throated Hummingbird (Archilochus colubris) was reported at a feeder in Mobile, Alabama for one of the few CBC records of the species. The Ringed Turtle Dove (Streptopelia risoria) is a visitor of sorts; and 2 were reported from the suburban Mobile colony that has been breeding for several years, this, however, being its first CBC record.

Other Visitors--Choc. Bay again reported an adult Great Black-backed Gull (Larus marinus), thought presumably to be the same bird that has been spending winters at the Destin East Pass for the last 5 years. Gannets (Morus bassanus), also from northern waters, were found on 4 counts with a high of 63 at Gulf

Shores (second highest AOS CBC). Terns that are rare in winter on the Gulf Coast included 1 Gull-billed Tern (Gelochelidon nilotica) at Mobile (its third CBC record) and 25 Sandwich Terns at Bay County (an AOS CBC record by 10) with another at Dauphin Island.

Perhaps the most significant shorebird report was of the 2 Marbled Godwits (Limosa fedoa) at Bay County, the first NW Fla. CBC record; and a Northern Oriole (Icterus galbula) was found within the count week at Marianna, the third straight year one has been seen on its count or within the count week there.

Among summer residents that are rare to uncommon in winter on the Gulf Coast, the Yellow-throated Warbler (Dendroica dominica) was seen on 6 counts with a CBC record for Alabama of 5 at Gulf Shores. The Black-and-White Warbler (Mniotilta varia) was seen on only 2 coastal counts as compared with a high of 12 on 6 counts 2 years ago in 1976, but the 6 birds at Marianna were one of its highest CBC's. The White-eyed Vireo (Vireo griseus) was found on 5 coastal counts, but the total of 9 birds was much under the 31 on 7 such counts in 1976. Among wading birds that are more common in summer, the Cattle Egret (Bubulcus ibis) was reported on 6 counts, including Eufaula Wildlife Refuge (42--an inland CBC record), Marianna (21--a NW Fla. CBC record), and CBC or near CBC record numbers at Gulf Shores (36), Dauphin Island (19), and Bay County (15). There were 39 Yellow-crowned Night Herons (Nyctanassa violacea) at Bay County (an OAS CBC record) and 1 to 2 birds on 4 other coastal counts, while the Green Heron (Butorides virescens) was also reported on four coastal counts or within their count weeks with a high this year of 2 at Dauphin Island.

Effect of Harsh Winters--Harsh winters appear to be particularly hard on small birds that are primarily insectivorous and have low body weights requiring high rates of metabolism. While the previous winter of 1977-78 was the coldest on record overall, there were more severe drops in temperature during the

winter of 1976-77, which was, therefore, probably harder on such fragile species. The changes in selected species recorded on the same 13 AOS CBC's in 1976 through 1978 (with the percentages showing changes during those years) are presented in Table I.

It will be noted that CBC counts of 4 of the species in Table I are still decreasing with the Golden-crowned Kinglet being the hardest hit of all; and, were it not for the high number of 33 Yellowthroats at Bay County, its numbers would still be going down. Recovery of the Pine Warbler from 1977-78 consists primarily of an increase on the coastal counts led by Choc. Bay (97) and Gulf Shores (88) although a record for the Tennessee Valley, where the bird is not nearly as common as elsewhere, was set at Guntersville, Alabama (22). Recovery of the Yellow-rumped Warbler was led by Pensacola (1885--a NW Fla. CBC record). Guntersville also had a Tennessee Valley winter record for Eastern Bluebirds (57). Three Gray Catbirds (Dumetella carolinensis) were found as far inland as Birmingham where they are rare in winter. In somewhat similar status was the House Wren with, however, high counts at Gulf Shores (31) and Pensacola (21); and 1 bird of that species was found at Guntersville where it is rare that far north.

The possible effect of harsh winters on hardier species, i.e., those that do not rely so heavily on an insect diet or are of larger size, is noted in the article on the 1977 Christmas Counts in Alabama Birdlife (1978), 26(1-2):3. For those species this last Christmas season, Pensacola set Gulf Coast abundance records of 99 Chickadees (Parus sp.) and 88 Tufted Titmice (Parus bicolor). Guntersville reported Tennessee Valley records of 20 White-breasted Nuthatches (Sitta carolinensis), 65 Brown-headed Nuthatches (Sitta pusilla), and 17 Brown Creepers (Certhia familiaris), the last being the second highest AOS CBC. In addition, 2 White-breasted Nuthatches were found at Mobile where they are rare that far south.

TABLE I. CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DATA FOR THE YEARS 1976-78.

| <u>Species</u> | <u>1976</u> | <u>1977</u> | <u>Percent change</u> | <u>1978</u> | <u>Percent change over 1977</u> |
|---|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|---|
| Pine Warbler (<u>Dendroica pinus</u>) | 540 | 260 | -52 | 467 | +79.6 |
| House Wren (<u>Troglodytes aedon</u>) | 138 | 97 | -30 | 111 | +14.4 |
| Yellow-rumped (or Myrtle) Warbler (<u>Dendroica coronata</u>) | 10872 | 6043 | -44.4 | 7786 | +28.8 |
| Carolina Wren (<u>Thryothorus ludovicianus</u>) | 760 | 539 | -29.1 | 496 | -8.0 |
| Eastern Bluebird (<u>Sialia sialis</u>) | 407 | 247 | -39.3 | 248 | 0 |
| Solitary (or Blue- headed) Vireo (<u>Vireo solitarius</u>) | 96 | 46 | -52.1 | 58 | +26.1 |
| Ruby-crowned Kinglet (<u>Regulus calendula</u>) | 2494 | 757 | -69.6 | 1208 | +59.6 |
| Eastern Phoebe (<u>Sayornis phoebe</u>) | 297 | 152 | -48.8 | 137 | -9.9 |
| Common Yellowthroat (<u>Geothlypis trichas</u>) | 187 | 61 | -67.4 | 72 | +18.0 |
| Hermit Thrush (<u>Cathara guttata</u>) | 293 | 121 | -58.7 | 105 | -13.2 |
| Orange-crowned Warbler (<u>Vermivora celata</u>) | 93 | 17 | -81.7 | 28 | +64.7 |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet (<u>Regulus satrapa</u>) | 364 | 116 | -68.1 | 78 | -32.8 |

Due to the dry weather in 1978 (a stark contrast with 1979), much of the Chipola River bottomlands could be explored on the Marianna CBC, and the results were Gulf Coast records of 10 Brown Creepers and 21 Winter Wrens (Troglodytes troglodytes).

Endangered Species--The Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) seems to be making a come-back. This year and last, there were more Bald Eagles in the Tenn. Valley than at any time since 1960; and, by coincidence, there were the same numbers on the AOS CBC's--1 adult and 4 immatures at Guntersville and 2 immatures at Wheeler Refuge, the latter being the 10th straight year one or more have been reported on either Wheeler counts or within its count periods. Ospreys (Pandion haliaetus) were found at Marianna (1) and Bay County (3)--the highest AOS CBC record; and single Peregrine Falcons (Falco peregrinus) were at Wheeler (its third straight CBC), Dauphin Island, Ft. Morgan and Bay County. The totals of 4 for each of these endangered species are the highest for AOS CBC's in many years.

Hawks--Most hawks are included on the "Blue-List" of species not yet considered endangered but whose numbers are reported on the decline (see American Birds (1978), 32(6):1106). However, the Sharp-shinned Hawk (Accipiter striatus), whose numbers may well be increasing, was again found in good numbers in the AOS area--25 birds on 11 counts, the highs being 4 at Wheeler, Marianna and Bay County. The Cooper's Hawk (Accipiter cooperi), which is rarer, tallied 13 birds on 9 counts, almost the same as last year. The Northern Harrier (or Marsh Hawk, Circus cyaneus) was up this year with 106 birds on 12 counts as compared with 65 birds on 11 in 1977; high was Gulf Shores with a Gulf Coast winter record of 23. The Red-tailed Hawk (Buteo jamacensis), always found in good numbers in the Coastal Plain in winter, set an AOS abundance record at Tuscaloosa (90). Although the "Blue-Listed" American Kestrel (Falco sparverius) is extremely difficult to find in the AOS area during the breeding

season, the 1978 CBC's produced another high total led by Gulf Shores with the second highest AOS CBC record (55) followed by Dauphin Island (48) and Pensacola (36), a NW Fla. CBC record. Its relative, the Merlin (Falco columbarius), had 5 birds on 4 counts, the high being 2 at Gulf Shores for its 6th CBC report in the last 7 years.

Birds of the Shore and Marsh--Real estate developments are rapidly decreasing beach habitat; consequently, many birds that nest on our beaches are on the "Blue-List." On the 1978 AOS CBC's, the Piping Plover (Charadrius melodus) was recorded in the lowest number since 1968--only 2 on 1 count, and the Snowy Plover (Charadrius alexandrinus) the lowest since 1973 with 13 on 4 counts. Again, there were no Wilson's Plovers (Charadrius wilsonia); although that plover may be reasonably abundant on the Atlantic Coast, the last AOS CBC record for it was 1 bird in 1969. The American Oystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus), also on the "Blue-List," is always reasonably rare in the AOS area, but this year the 15 at Dauphin Island was a modern AOS abundance record.

The center of the Wheeler Refuge count circle was moved slightly to the west to include portions of the Swan Creek Wildlife Management Area on the north bank of the Tennessee River. There the mudflats of Beulah Bay produced not only the record CBC of Lapland Longspurs referred to above but also 1416 Horned Larks (Eremophila alpestris) (an AOS CBC high count by almost 800) and record numbers of several shorebirds--inland winter records of Dunlins (Erolia alpina) 422 and 24 Western Sandpipers (Ereunetes mauri), second highest count of 54 Greater Yellowlegs (Totanus melanoleucus), and North Alabama winter records of 289 Common Snipe (Capella gallinago), 128 Least Sandpipers (Erolia minutilla) and 7 Lesser Yellowlegs (Totanus blavipes). Tuscaloosa also had high inland counts for the Snipe (209) and 20 Western Sandpipers (Ereunetes mauri) while Birmingham reported a single Dunlin (Erolia

alpina) for its third CBC record and 8 Dowitchers (Limnodromus) (unidentified as to species), the first winter for North Alabama. On the coast, Bay County tallied high numbers of 359 Dunlins and 79 Greater Yellowlegs (Totanus melanoleucus), while the 42 Lesser Yellowlegs at Mobile are an AOS winter record.

The spotted Sandpiper (Actitis macularia) did well on the 1978 CBC's, being found on a record 10 counts or in the count weeks. Pensacola led with 13, and others were found inland at Eufaula Refuge (3--an inland CBC record), Birmingham (1 bird for its fourth straight year) and Guntersville (also 1). The Killdeer (Chadrius vociferus) did well too, with 894 at Gulf Shores, but also including 846 at Wheeler (an AOS inland record by 300). Mobile added high counts of 95 Black-bellied Plovers (Squatarola squatarola) and 90 American Avocets (Recurvirostra americana). This makes 16 of the last 18 CBC's for the Avocet, which formerly was considered rare in winter in the East.

Bay County reported a Purple Gallinule (Porphyryla martinica) for the third time since 1974, 2 Limpkins (Aramus guarana), and a Semipalmated Sandpiper (Ereunetes pusillus). The marsh habitat around Gulf Shores that has attracted Sandhill Cranes (Grus canadensis) has been subject to intermittent encroachments; but after a miss in 1977, 14 birds were found in 1978. Unfortunately, however, it is believed that the most favored marsh area along the intracoastal waterway is no longer satisfactory. Quantitatively, the American Coot (Fulica americana) was counted in record numbers at Guntersville (almost 13,700 for a modern inland record) and 10,000 at Mobile. Strangely enough, however, it was in low numbers on most other counts.

In the wading bird category, Reddish Egrets (Dichromanassa rufescens) were found on 3 counts--6 at Bay County (an AOS CBC record), 2 at Dauphin Island (the fifth of its last 6 CBC's), and 1 at Choc. Bay.

Great Blue Herons (Andrea herodias) were in high numbers at Wheeler Refuge (146--a North Ala. CBC record by 50) and at Bay County (126--a Gulf Coast CBC record). A total of 10 American Bitterns (Botaurus lentiginosus) was found on 5 counts, led by 3 each at Eufaula and Bay County.

Waterfowl--Reports of ducks were inconsistent with more low numbers than highs and often some complete misses, especially for surface-feeding ducks on the coast. Highest numbers inland were the approximately 6600 American Widgeons (Mareca americana) at Wheeler Refuge (second highest AOS CBC record) and almost 2400 Gadwalls (Anas strepera) at Guntersville (highest AOS record since 1964). Wheeler also set a North Ala. CBC record of 416 Green-winged Teal (Anas carolinensis), with 2 Blue-winged Teal found as far inland as Tuscaloosa. On the coast, the highest abundance records were for the Redhead (Aythya americana) at Bay County (4300--an AOS abundance record by almost 2000) and at Choc. Bay (1413).

Overall, the Lesser Scaup (Aythya affinis) again probably did best by setting CBC or second highest CBC records on both inland and coastal counts--Bay County (2100), Dauphin Island (1570), Guntersville (640), Pensacola (514), Gulf Shores (500), Wheeler Refuge (344) and Tuscaloosa (203), the number at Guntersville being a CBC record for the Tennessee Valley. Inland, the first and second North Ala. abundance records were set for Common Goldeneyes (Bucephala clangula) at Guntersville (288) and Wheeler (122); and, on the coast, the first and second AOS abundance records were set for Buffleheads (Bucephala albeola) at Choc. Bay (584) and Bay County (539). The Hooded Merganser (Lophodytes cucullatus) did well at each end of the area with a modern North Ala. record at Wheeler (244) and first and second Gulf Coast winter records at Choc. Bay (101) and Bay County (79). Since the advent of our harsh winters, the Common Merganser (Mergus merganser) is being found in greater

numbers than previously on the Tennessee River, this time with 7 at Wheeler and 1 at Gunter'sville.

Woodpeckers--One might suspect the Wheeler Refuge observers baited the area with suet since the Wheeler count set Tennessee Valley records of 95 Downy Woodpeckers (Dendrocopos pubescens), 90 Red-bellied Woodpeckers (Centurus carolinus), 19 Hairy Woodpeckers (Dendrocopos villosus), and 44 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers (Sphyrapicus varius). The Hairy Woodpecker, however, was found in low numbers on almost every other count on which it was reported. Pileated Woodpeckers (Dryocopus pileatus) are, as is most of the family, not found in as high numbers on the coast as inland; but this year it did well with a tie for the Gulf Coast record being set at Mobile and Marianna (20 each).

Winter Finches and Nuthatches--Invasions of boreal finches into the South are cyclical; and, while the cycle used to be every four years, it was three between 1972 and 1975 and only two between 1975 and 1977, the year of the last large invasion. A strong factor in the cycle is the food supply in northern forests but another could well be an increase in population, which is known to have occurred in the case of the Evening Grosbeak (Hesperiphona vespertina). In the "echo" year of 1978-79, there were, however, no Evening Grosbeaks on the AOS CBC's and practically none found during the entire winter. Similarly, there were none on CBC's in the previous "echo" year of 1976. Also, comparing the 1978 counts with those in 1976, there were only 9 Pine Siskins (Spinus pinus) on four counts compared with 9 on 3, 1975 Purple Finches (Carpodacus purpureus) on 7 counts compared with 669 on 15, and 30 Red-breasted Nuthatches (Sitta canadensis) on 10 counts compared with 50 on 9. A total of 1461 American Goldfinches (Spinus tristis) was only around 50-60% of the total in 1976 (2480) or 1977 (2828).

Sparrows--Wheeler Refuge led the region in sparrow abundance with Tennessee Valley CBC or second highest CBC records of 1306 White-throated Sparrows (Zonotrichia albicollis), 363 Song Sparrows (Melospiza melodia), 358 Swamp Sparrows (Melospiza georgiana), 349 Field Sparrows (Spizella pusilla), and 228 Savannah Sparrows (Passerculus sandwichensis), while Gunterville reported a Tennessee Valley record 111 Chipping Sparrows (Spizella passerina). Also identified at Gunterville was a Lincoln's Sparrow (Melospiza lincolni), which might be considered a western visitor since it is much more common in the West. Tuscaloosa had an Upper Coastal Plain record of 239 Swamp Sparrows, and Marianna the second highest Gulf Coast CBC of 179 Vesper Sparrows (Pooecetes gramineus). However, sparrows of both grasslands and other habitats were found in low numbers on virtually every other count with zeros on many.

Other non-passerines--The most notable observations in this category were of the White Pelican (Pelecanus erythrorhynchos), which was reported on 5 counts with the phenomenal number for an AOS CBC record of 770 at Choc. Bay; others were at Mobile (130), Pensacola (7), Gulf Shores (6) and Marianna (1), the last 3 counts being the first CBC records for those areas. The 2 Double-crested Cormorants (Phalacrocorax auritus) at Wheeler Refuge were significant since, until recently, cormorants have been virtually extirpated from inland waters. Gunterville had second inland count records of 295 Pied-billed Grebes (Podilymbus podiceps) and 107 Horned Grebes (Podiceps auritus) and a North Ala. record of 42 Common Loons (Gavia immer). Bay County reported a Gulf Coast abundance record for the Pied-billed Grebe (102), and other highs for the loon were a near Gulf Coast CBC record on Bay County (339) and inland CBC records at Wheeler (27) and Tuscaloosa (20).

As often has been the case, Bay County did well in the gull category--its 1713 Herring Gulls (Larus argentatus) set an AOS CBC record, and its 1863

Laughing Gulls (Larus atricilla) were highest for NW Fla. Pensacola also had a high number of Laughing Gulls (1356), while first and second highest inland CBC records for Ring-billed Gulls (Larus delawarensis) were at Wheeler (1136) and Guntersville (659). High for the Bonaparte's Gull (Larus philadelphia) this year was the 1040 at Choc. Bay, second highest NW Fla. CBC record.

Among the owls, the 9 Barred Owls (Strix varia) at Marianna were the second highest for an AOS CBC, while Tennessee Valley highs were set at Guntersville of 5 Barred Owls and 4 Great Horned Owls (Bubo virginianus). Three Short-eared Owls (Asio flammeus) were reported at Wheeler from two different airport locations.

Other non-passerine records in abundance included: 1048 Mourning Doves (Zenaidura macroura) at Tuscaloosa (an Upper Coast Plain CBC record, and 894 at Pensacola (a NW Fla. CBC record); 48 Ground Doves (Columbigalina passerina) at Marianna (only one under the Gulf Coast abundance record); and 65 Belted Kingfishers (Megaceryle alcyon) at Pensacola (an AOS abundance record), 51 at Bay County, 25 at Guntersville (a Tennessee Valley record), and 21 at Birmingham (its second highest CBC).

Other passerines--Noteworthy in this category was the fantastic number of Common Grackles (Quiscalus quiscula) reported from Wheeler Refuge--5,000,000, flying to and from a roost down the Tennessee River. In addition, Pensacola had a high for the Gulf Coast of over 8000. Wheeler also reported a record 1110 Cedar Waxwings (Bombycilla cedrorum), a Tennessee Valley record by 650.

Other passerine abundance records included: Fish Crow (Corvus ossifragus) CBC records away from roosts of 851 at Pensacola and 604 at Mobile; American Robin (Turdus migratorius)--8700 at Marianna (second highest CBC for NW Fla.); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

(Polioptila caerulea)--29 at Pensacola (second highest AOS CBC) with one inland at Tuscaloosa; Loggerhead Shrikes (Lanius ludovicianus)--65 at Marianna (second highest AOS CBC); and Palm Warbler (Dendroica palmarum)--47 at Marianna (a NW Fla. winter record, including reports of both races) with 2 at Wheeler (its fourth recent CBC record).

On the 1978 AOS CBC's, there was a total of 194 species (including two within the count weeks). For complete tabulations of all CBC's, see Vol. 33, No. 4 of American Birds. A summary of the 13 AOS counts is in Table 2.

TABLE II. A SUMMARY OF THE 1978 AOS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

| <u>Count--Date (Compiler)</u> | <u>On Count</u> | <u>Within Count Week</u> | <u>Total Individuals</u> | <u>Partici- pants</u> | <u>Parties</u> | <u>Party- Hours</u> |
|--|-----------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Wheeler Wildlife Refuge-- Dec. 16 (J. Milton Harris) | 106 | 106 | 5,217,236 | 34 | 10 | 85(c) |
| Guntersville--Dec. 23 (C. Dwight Cooley) | 96 | 96 | 51,882 | 10 | 4 | 50 |
| Birmingham--Dec. 30 (Thomas A. Imhof) | 83 | 85 | 14,383 | 34(b) | 14 | 113.5 |
| Tuscaloosa--Dec. 21 (James C. Thompson) | 85 | 87 | 14,356 | 14 | 4 | 34 |
| Eufaula Wildlife Refuge-- Dec. 23 (Sam Pate, Jr.) | 121 | 122 | 17,063 | 9 | 6 | 46.5 |
| Mobile--Dec. 26 (M. Wilson Gaillard) | 123 | 123 | 18,910 | 22 | 7 | 53 |
| Dauphin Island--Dec. 30 (Richard E. Hayward, Jr.) | 124 | 128 | 8,358 | 21 | 10 | 68(c) |
| Ft. Morgan--Dec. 23 (Mary Lou Mattis & Sherlie E. Gade) | 104 | 105 | 4,491 | 17 | 6 | 60(c) |
| Gulf Shores--Jan. 1 (P. Fairly Chandler) | 122 | 125 | 30,364 | 27 | 8 | 80.75 |
| Pensacola--Dec. 16 (Curtis L. Kingsbery) | 108 | 109 | 22,641 | 47 | 11 | 104.75(c) |
| Choctawhatchee Bay--Dec. 17 (Sandra Lefstad) | 122 | 128 | 14,648 | 27 | 6 | 61(c) |
| Marianna--Dec. 16 (Marion W. Gray) | 100 | 108 | 19,323 | 16(b) | 8 | 73(c) |
| Bay County (Panama City)-- Dec. 29 (Joe B. Harbison) | 142 | 142 | 22,859 | 30 | 10 | 84(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. In 1978, this treatment affects only geese.

(b) Additional observers at feeders.

(c) Includes boat party.

