

SPRING SIGHTINGS (MARCH - MAY 2005)

Paul D. Kittle, Greg D. Jackson, and Robert A. Duncan

This report covers the period from March through May 2005 in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle (west of the Apalachicola River). The appearance of observations in this article does not suggest verification or acceptance of records for very rare species; these must be considered by the appropriate state records committees. All submissions of birds that are rare, either in general or for a particular season or region, must be accompanied by adequate details of the observation. The extent of this documentation depends on the rarity of the species and the difficulty of identification. For guidance, observers are encouraged to consult the Alabama Ornithological Society checklist. Reports should note conditions of observation and the diagnostic characters observed. Your help in this matter is appreciated.

Abbreviations and italics: County names are in italics and, except for the Florida counties of *Bay*, *Escambia*, *Gulf*, *Okaloosa*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Walton*, are in Alabama. “@” = under review by; “ABRC” = Alabama Bird Records Committee; “AFB” = Air Force Base; “b.” = banded; “FWBSF” = Fort Walton Beach Spray Fields; “m.ob.” = many observers; “NABS” = North Alabama Birdwatcher’s Society; “NAMC” = North American Migration Count; “NF” = National Forest; “NWR” = National Wildlife Refuge; “ph.” = photographed; “SP” = State Park; “WMA” = Wildlife Management Area; “WP” = Western Panhandle of Florida (*Escambia*, *Okaloosa*, and *Santa Rosa* counties); “WTF” = Woerner Turf Farm.

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK – Casual in the WP, 17 were counted 17 March at Pensacola, *Escambia* (Ann Forster, Dan Forster). A single was noted 5 April- 6 May at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* (Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown, Laura Catterton *et al.*).

ROSS’S GOOSE – Rare but regular, and increasing, one was noted at Crow Creek, Stevenson, *Jackson*, 2 March (Damien Simbeck).

WOOD DUCK – During the NAMC on 14 May, Julian Dusi *et al.* tallied 165 in *Lee*, establishing a new maximum for the Mountain Region.

MOTTLED DUCK – One was photographed in downtown Pensacola, *Escambia*, 8 April (Cheryl Bunch, Maria Trimble, Mary Jones), to mark the first April record for the WP.

REDHEAD – A single near Leighton, *Colbert*, 6 May (Steve McConnell, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner) was late.

GREATER SCAUP – One at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 31 May (Don Ware, Bob Duncan, m.ob.), was the latest ever for the WP. A male near Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 6 May (Steve McConnell, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner) set a late departure record for inland Alabama.

LESSER SCAUP – During the NAMC on 14 May, Linda Reynolds *et al.* found 11 in

Marshall, a good number so late.

SCOTER SP. – Any scoter is rare on the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, so one unidentified individual seen at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, 15 April (Geoff Hill) was notable.

RUFFED GROUSE – One was heard near the Walls of Jericho in Skyline WMA, *Jackson*, 21 May (Steve McConnell), where this species is rare and local.

RED-THROATED LOON – Damien Simbeck found one at Spring Creek, *Lawrence*, 10 March (rare but regular in the Tennessee Valley).

PACIFIC LOON – Rare but regular in the WP, two in basic plumage were at Pensacola Beach, *Escambia*, 6 April (Bob Duncan), while one in full alternate plumage was at the same site 6-7 May (Peggy Baker, Cheryl Bunch; ph.).

COMMON LOON – At separate sites on Smith Lake, *Cullman*, there were an estimated 40 on 5 April and 64+ on 6 April (Jeff Garner), good numbers for the Mountain Region.

EARED GREBE – Two birds lingered at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 2 March – 2 April (Bob Duncan, m.ob.), where they had been present since fall 2004 (rare in spring in the WP).

SOOTY SHEARWATER – One at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 1 April (Mary Gustafson), marked the 13th record for Alabama.

AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER – One landed on the boat of Jeremy West, 30 miles south of Pensacola Beach, *Escambia*, 4 April. It was taken to the Wildlife Sanctuary of Northwest Florida and identified by Dorothy Kaufmann *et al.*

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN – Uncommon but increasing for inland Alabama, three reports came from Wilson Reservoir, *Colbert/Lauderdale*: four, 28 February, nine, 1 March (Damien Simbeck), and 100+ (good number), 5 March (June White, John White).

AMERICAN BITTERN – This species is rarely detected as an inland migrant and is probably uncommon, so three reports were noteworthy: one at Donovan Lake, Marion, *Perry*, 26 March (Pelham Rowan, m.ob.), one at Wheeler NWR, *Morgan*, 23 April (Phillip Johnson, Pieter van der Luit), and six (maximum count for Alabama) at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, 27 April (Bailey McKay, Geoff Hill).

LEAST BITTERN – In the Tennessee Valley, this species is a rare and local breeder. Singles were found 6 May (Steve McConnell, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner) at Oakland Marsh, *Lauderdale*, and Big Nance Creek at County Road 271, *Lawrence*.

REDDISH EGRET – Eight were counted in *Mobile* during the NAMC 14 May (ties maximum count for Alabama).

GLOSSY IBIS – An adult in alternate plumage was found near Leighton, *Colbert*, 6 May (Steve McConnell, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner) (rare for inland Alabama).

WHITE-FACED IBIS – Two birds with red eyes and complete white borders around eyes and face were observed at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 19 April – 11 May (Brian Monk, Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Alan Knothe *et al.*) (sixth WP record). This

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- species is becoming more regular in Alabama, with a single establishing the 17th record at Bayou La Batre, *Mobile*, 1 May (Geoff Hill *et al.*).
- ROSEATE SPOONBILL** – The second spring record for Alabama was marked 10-12 April by one bird at Orange Beach, *Baldwin* (John Porter).
- BLACK VULTURE** – During the NAMC in *Lee*, 14 May, Julian Dusi *et al.* counted 114 (good number).
- OSPREY** – A new maximum spring count (21) for the Gulf Coast was set on the NAMC in *Baldwin*, 14 May (Venetia Friend *et al.*). Eight (a maximum for the Tennessee Valley) were found in *Marshall*, 14 May (NAMC, Linda Reynolds *et al.*).
- SWALLOW-TAILED KITE** – A pair (probably nesting) was seen at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, in late April (Bailey McKay, Windle McKenzie) and 1 May (John Cole). Nesting is undocumented in this area of the state.
- MISSISSIPPI KITE** – Jeff Garner spotted one five miles northwest of Petersville, *Lauderdale*, 15 May (fifth record for northwest Alabama).
- BALD EAGLE** – An adult on a nest was reported from along Town Creek, *Lawrence*, 5 March (June White, John White) (third year of nesting at this site). Two were found on the NAMC in the Blakeley area, *Baldwin*, 14 May (Betsy Eager, Laurie Bailey) (locally rare).
- NORTHERN HARRIER** – A single was late for the Tennessee Valley in *Marshall*, 14 May (Linda Reynolds *et al.*).
- SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** – On the NAMC, late singles were noted 14 May in the Wolf Bay area, *Baldwin* (Homer Singleton), and in the Bellingrath Road area, *Mobile* (Tuck Hayward).
- PRAIRIE FALCON** – One was seen at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 24 April (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Betsy Tetlow; @ABRC) to mark the fifth record for Alabama and the first away from *Marshall*.
- BLACK RAIL** – Tom Siegwald saw one at the Dauphin Island Airport marsh, *Mobile*, 14 May (rare but regular at this site in spring). This is the latest spring occurrence for the Gulf Coast (except for summer records) and indicates possible nesting at this site.
- KING RAIL** – Rare and local in the Tennessee Valley, several were found at Oakland Marsh, *Lauderdale*, 6 May (Steve McConnell, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner), a site where the species has been regular.
- COMMON MOORHEN** – A Birmingham Audubon Society field trip turned up a single at Lake Land Farms, *Perry*, 26 March, and another bird was at Lee County Public Lake, *Lee*, 14 May (John Ernst, Virginia Ernst) (at both sites, rare this far north).
- AMERICAN AVOCET** – Forty-two were counted at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin*, 21 April (Gary Wayner), a good number away from Blakeley Island.
- WILLET** – The spring count conducted by the Birmingham Audubon Society in *Jefferson*, 30 April, produced three individuals (rare inland).

- UPLAND SANDPIPER** – Laura Catterton counted 75+ at Lillian, *Baldwin*, 2 April (maximum count for the Gulf Coast of Alabama). Larry Gardella also had a good number (24) at the WTF, *Lowndes*, 3 April.
- WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER** – One was early at Harpersville, *Shelby*, 30 April (Ann Miller).
- BAIRD’S SANDPIPER** – The first March record for the WP was established by two birds seen at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 29 March (Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown). A single was at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 1 May (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan) (rare in spring).
- PECTORAL SANDPIPER** – Near Leighton, *Colbert*, Damien Simbeck counted 131 (good number) 1 April.
- STILT SANDPIPER** – Early for inland Alabama, one was noted at Prattville, *Autauga*, 6 March (Tommy Pratt). At Blakeley Island, *Mobile*, Howard Horne found 81 on 20 March (good number so early).
- BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER** – Casual in spring in the WP, three birds at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 29 March (Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown) established the second March record for the area, and two birds were present at the same site 27 April (Cecil Brown, Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan). Rare in spring for inland Alabama, reports of singles came from the WTF, *Lowndes*, 3 April (Larry Gardella), and near Leighton, *Colbert*, 6 May (Steve McConnell, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner).
- LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** – “Many” were calling at Blakeley Island, *Mobile*, 20 March (Howard Horne) (early for large numbers).
- AMERICAN WOODCOCK** – It is uncommon to document nesting for this species in Alabama, so an adult and two downy young were noteworthy at Alexander City, *Tallapoosa*, 26 March (Linda Baker).
- WILSON’S PHALAROPE** – Sue Moske located one near Decatur, *Limestone*, 4 May (rare inland).
- LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** – An adult was noted at the Pensacola Bay Bridge, *Santa Rosa*, 8 March (Bill Bremser), a third-winter bird was at Panama City, *Bay*, 14-19 April (Carolyn Matkovich; ph.), and an adult was at the Magnolia Springs Landfill, *Baldwin*, 4 March (Bob Duncan) (rare).
- CASPIAN TERN** – A single was at Town Creek Marsh, *Colbert*, 6 April (Damien Simbeck) (early for the Tennessee Valley).
- LEAST TERN** – This species is rare in the Mountain Region, so one was noteworthy at Clay, *Jefferson*, 14 May (Bob Sargent).
- SOOTY TERN** – Rare but regular recently near Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, one was found 14 May (Terry Hartley, John Stowers).
- BLACK SKIMMER** – Occasional for inland Alabama, but unusual without an associated tropical storm, one was early for inland Alabama at the Walter F. George Dam, *Henry*, 29 May (James Flynn, Earl Horn).
- EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** – Many were noted in northwest Birmingham, *Jefferson*, in May, at a site where the species has been present and increasing since

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2001 (David Crider) (documents continued expansion throughout Alabama).

BARN OWL – A pair with a nest containing four eggs on 20 March and two eggs and two young on 3 April was documented along County Road 4 in Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* (Bill Summerour; ph.). Nests of this species are uncommonly documented in Alabama, and this same site was used for nesting in 2004.

BURROWING OWL – One was noted on a 12 March survey of Site B-70, Eglin AFB, *Okaloosa* (Lenny Fenimore).

WHIP-POOR-WILL – Rare documentation of nesting for this species came from the Walls of Jericho area of *Jackson*. Barry Grand found a female at a nest with two eggs 17 May, and Eric Soehren photographed the two young 9 June.

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD – One was at Silverhill, *Baldwin*, 27-29 March (Bill Summerour) (20th record for Alabama; ph.).

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD – The first May record for the WP was marked by one in *Okaloosa*, 14 May (Don Ware).

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER – A late bird was noted at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, *Jefferson*, 6 May (Greg Harber, Larry Gardella).

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE – The NAMC 14 May in *Marshall* produced 23, a maximum spring count for the Tennessee Valley (Linda Reynolds *et al.*).

WESTERN KINGBIRD – A single was spotted at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 27 April (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown) (casual in spring in the WP).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER – One was seen 30 April at the Alabama A&M Farms, *Madison* (a known nesting site) (Ken Ward, NABS). This species is still rare in Alabama, but is increasing as a breeder.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO – One at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 6 May (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson) was late. This vireo is an uncommon breeder in Alabama and nesting is rarely documented, so the following records are noteworthy: a pair carrying nest material in the Coleman Lake area, Talladega NF, *Cleburne*, 5 April (Eric Soehren, Bill Summerour, Keith Gauldin), and an adult and a fledgling at a new site in Skyline WMA, *Jackson*, 13 May (Eric Soehren).

WARBLING VIREO – A rarely detected transient, one was heard singing on the early date of 31 March at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* (Bob Sargent *et al.*).

PHILADELPHIA VIREO – Rare as a spring transient, three records were received: one at Colbert Ferry Park, *Colbert*, 24 April (Ken Ward, NABS) (early for Tennessee Valley); one at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 8 May (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson); and two in *St. Clair*, 14 May (NAMC).

RED-EYED VIREO – Howard Horne observed one on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 19 March (early), while one at Clay, *Jefferson*, 23 March (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent) was early for the Mountain Region.

FISH CROW – Locally rare but increasing, four records were received from *Jefferson*: one, Homewood, first week of March (Ann Miller); two, Hoover, 22 March (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson); one, Birmingham Botanical Gardens, 5 April (Greg Harber); and two, *Jefferson* NAMC, 14 May. The fourth Tennessee

Valley record was set by two along the Elk River, *Lauderdale/Limestone*, 10 April (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson, Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton) and 14 April (Damien Simbeck *et al.*). A pair building a nest at the mouth of Town Creek, *Colbert/Lawrence*, 6 May (Steve McConnell, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner) marked the fifth Tennessee Valley record and first nesting in that region.

TREE SWALLOW – Two at Lee County Lake, *Lee*, 3 March (Lorna West) were early. Twenty was a good number so early 8 March, Muscle Shoals, *Colbert* (Damien Simbeck).

CLIFF SWALLOW – Ten at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 8 March, were early for Alabama (Damien Simbeck). A pair at an active nest at Lake Purdy, *Shelby*, 1 May (Rick West) was at a new site and documents the continuing expansion of this species.

CAVE SWALLOW – Casual in the WP, a single was found at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 25 April (Bob Duncan). One at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 1 May (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan) was rare but the species is becoming regular.

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH – One was late at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, *Jefferson*, 6 May (Greg Harber, Larry Gardella).

HOUSE WREN – Records of three late Gulf Coast birds, all singles seen on 14 May, were received: Hurricane area, *Baldwin* (Keith Carter), Bellingrath area, *Mobile* (Tuck Hayward), and Dauphin Island, *Mobile* (Tom Siegwald, Joan Siegwald). One at Elkmont, *Limestone*, 26 May (Damien Simbeck) may have been a late migrant or a rare breeder.

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER – A new maximum (42) for the Tennessee Valley was set on the NAMC in *Marshall*, 14 May (Linda Reynolds *et al.*).

SWAINSON'S THRUSH – Twenty-five were counted at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 6 May (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson) to mark a new maximum for the Tennessee Valley.

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT – Five birds were detected on the Burrowing Owl survey at site B-70, Eglin AFB, *Okaloosa*, 5-12 March (Lenny Fenimore, Charles Parkel; ph.).

NASHVILLE WARBLER – A single was early on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 27 March (Lee McElvaine), while Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, hosted two on 1 May (Ken Ward, NABS) and one on 6 May (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson) (rare in spring).

YELLOW WARBLER – An adult male detected on the White Hall Breeding Bird Survey, *Lowndes*, 28 May (Larry Gardella), was either late or evidence of very rare far southern nesting.

MAGNOLIA WARBLER – Damien Simbeck found a late bird at Elkmont, *Limestone*, 26 May.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER – A single on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 2 April (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan) was early. Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, hosted singles 1 May (Ken Ward, NABS) and 6 May (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson) (rare inland).

BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER – An early bird was at Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 27

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March (Lee McElvaine).

CERULEAN WARBLER – This species is a rare and local breeder in north Alabama, and the following records, all from new sites, indicate possible nesting: two males, Dry Hollow area of Upper Flannagin Creek, Bankhead NF, *Lawrence*, 12 May (Eric Soehren); one singing in the southeast block of the Hytop quad, *Jackson*, 19 May (Milton Harris, Bert Harris); and three, including one pair, at Hurricane Creek in the Walls of Jericho area, *Jackson*, 21 May (Steve McConnell).

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER – Lorna West found an early arriving male at Opelika, *Lee*, 18 March.

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER – “Hundreds” were on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 2 April (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan).

WORM-EATING WARBLER – Eighty-two was a good total at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 2-17 April (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent, Duane Berger, Donna Berger, Fred Bassett *et al.*; b.).

SWAINSON’S WARBLER – The annual banding effort at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 2-17 April (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent, Duane Berger, Donna Berger, Fred Bassett *et al.*) produced a good total of 48.

LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH – An early spring arrival was at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 17 March (John Ehinger).

WILSON’S WARBLER – This species is rare in spring in inland Alabama, so one found at Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 30 April (Betsy Eager *et al.*) was notable.

WESTERN TANAGER – Casual in the WP, an adult male was found at Pensacola, *Escambia*, 18 February – 1 March (Phylliss Swope; ph.), while a first winter bird was in west Pensacola, *Escambia*, from March – 20 April (Roberta Bonwit, Vince Murphy).

SCARLET TANAGER – A maximum count (12) for the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama was made 22 April at Montgomery, *Montgomery* (Larry Gardella).

LARK SPARROW – Rare and local but increasing as a breeder in the Tennessee Valley and Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, one was at a new site at Moontown, *Madison*, 15 April (Neill Cowles), and another was at a new site on Wheeler NWR, *Limestone*, 24 April (Ken Ward, NABS).

LINCOLN’S SPARROW – A single was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 2-9 March (Bob Duncan, Cecil Brown) (rare in WP). Rare in spring for inland Alabama, one was noted at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, 15 April (Geoff Hill).

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW – Jeff Garner found a singing and late bird at Tuscaloosa, *Tuscaloosa*, 26-27 May.

HARRIS’S SPARROW – One at a feeder in Killen, *Lauderdale*, 2-4 March (Shirley Wayland, Jim Wayland) marked the 14th record for Alabama.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW – Two in *Walton*, 14 May (Lee McDaniel) were very late for the WP.

DARK-EYED JUNCO – One in Niceville, *Okaloosa*, 14 May (Bob McKenney) was the latest departure ever for the WP by 12 days.

- BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK** – Very rare in the WP, a female was spotted at a feeder in Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 26 April (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Laura Catterton, Peggy Baker).
- PAINTED BUNTING** – One female-type photographed at a feeder in Prattville, *Autauga*, during the first week of March (Julia Rushton), was probably a wintering bird (one previous winter record for inland Alabama). This species is occasional in the Mountain Region and rare but increasing for inland Alabama, so a second-year male photographed at Auburn, *Lee*, 28 April (Shelley Ducharme) was noteworthy.
- DICKCISSEL** – Seven birds found in *Okaloosa* and *Walton*, 14 May (Don Ware, Mary Theberge) were the latest ever for the WP by five days. Three present and singing for several weeks in May at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour* (Lorna West) were probably nesting.
- SHINY COWBIRD** – Casual in spring in the WP, a male was at a feeder in Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 28 April (Bob Duncan), while another male was in *Okaloosa* 14 May (Don Ware).
- BRONZED COWBIRD** – Two were at the Shell Mounds on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 17 April (Phillip Johnson, Pauline Johnson, Pieter van der Luit) to mark the 12th record for Alabama.
- BALTIMORE ORIOLE** – Rare in winter in Alabama, a male was at a feeder in southern *Montgomery*, 6-7 March (Carol Alford, Randy Alford).
- BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** – An adult male was in Pinson, *Jefferson*, 15 April (David Ross, Carolyn Ross; ph.; @ABRC) (18th record for Alabama).
- PURPLE FINCH** – One was late departing Tallassee, *Elmore*, 11 April (Bob Reed, Pat Reed).
- WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL** – Only the second occurrence for Alabama, an adult male visited a feeder along the Elk River near Rogersville, *Lauderdale*, 7-21+ April (Robin Kelso, m.ob.; ph.; @ABRC).
- PINE SISKIN** – Late for the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, a single was at a feeder in Gallion, *Marengo*, 31 May (Don Self, Judy Self).

Paul D. Kittle, Department of Biology, University of North Alabama, Florence, AL 35632 (Email: pdkittle@una.edu). **Greg D. Jackson** [Alabama compiler], 2220 Baneberry Drive, Birmingham, AL 35244 (Email: g_d_jackson@bellsouth.net). **Robert A. Duncan** [NW Florida compiler], 614 Fairpoint Drive, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561 (Email: town_point@bellsouth.net).