

## SPRING SIGHTINGS (MARCH - MAY 2006)

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This report covers the period from March through May 2006 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; “BBA” = Breeding Bird Atlas; “CE” = central east; “FOSRC” = Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee; “FWBSF” = Fort Walton Beach Spray Fields; “m.ob.” = many observers; “NABS” = North Alabama Birdwatcher’s Society; “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).

**PACIFIC LOON** – Rare but regular in the WP, one was at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 25 March (Peggy Baker). Another single was at the Destin Bridge, *Okaloosa*, 21 May (Don Ware).

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** – A pair was at a nest (two eggs 2 April, nine eggs 9 April) at Theodore, *Mobile* (Bill Summerour; ph.) (uncommon and erratic breeder in Alabama).

**HORNED GREBE** – A bird in pre-alternate molt was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 24 May, to mark the second May record for the WP (Mac Myers, Bob Duncan).

**EARED GREBE** – Damien Simbeck found a single in near-alternate plumage at Town Creek Point, *Colbert*, 13 March (rare inland).

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** – Uncommon and increasing in the Tennessee Valley, 12 were at Town Creek Point, *Colbert*, 13 March (Damien Simbeck). Rare in the Mountain Region, 175 was an excellent number on Lake Martin, *Tallapoosa*, 12 May (Melissa Middlebrooks; ph.).

**BROWN PELICAN** – Six were just north of Stimley Bridge on Lake Logan Martin, *St. Clair/Tallapoosa*, 27 May (John Imhof, William Ratliff). This record establishes a new maximum number for inland Alabama, where the species is rare.

- SNOWY EGRET** – Three in *Colbert* (two at Pond Creek, one at Town Creek Marsh) 17 May (Damien Simbeck, Gary Markine, Frances Markine) was a good number for spring in the Tennessee Valley in recent years.
- YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** – A pair was seen building a nest at East Lake in Birmingham, *Jefferson*, 4 March (Ty Keith, Pelham Rowan, Frank Farrell, Helen Kittinger *et al.*) (early for spring for inland Alabama).
- WHITE-FACED IBIS** – One was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 17 May (Mac Myers, Bob Duncan) (10<sup>th</sup> WP record; ph.; @FOSRC).
- PLEGADIS SP.** – Jim Sherrill found a single at Lake Purdy, *Jefferson*, 10 April, to mark the fifth record for the Mountain Region.
- WOOD STORK** – One was early at Hacoda, *Geneva*, 29 May and 5 June (Odis Johnson; ph.).
- MISSISSIPPI KITE** – Rare in the Mountain Region, Mac Braid saw one at Montevallo, *Shelby*, 8 May, where the species has been regular in recent years.
- BALD EAGLE** – An immature near Moulton, *Lawrence*, 28 May (Paul Kittle) was locally rare.
- MERLIN** – Rare but regular in winter on the Inland Coastal Plain, one was at the fish hatchery at Marion, *Perry*, 18 March (Helen Kittinger, Ty Keith, m.ob.).
- BLACK RAIL** – One was seen at the Dauphin Island Airport marsh, *Mobile*, 15-21 April (Reese Partridge, Louise Partridge, Rynetta Coetzee, Stan Hamilton *et al.*) (rare but regular at this site).
- CLAPPER RAIL** – One was banded at an odd location, the Middle Ground at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 5 April (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent *et al.*).
- KING RAIL** – One was seen and heard at Donovan Lake, Marion, *Perry*, 18 March (Helen Kittinger, Ty Keith, Larry Wright) (rarely documented so early for inland Alabama, though probably uncommon in winter on the Inland Coastal Plain). A single was also reported from Donovan Lake on 20 May (Thomas Wilson). Three, a good number inland, were heard at the Kennedy Unit of Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, 31 March (Lorna West). This species has a scattered distribution, especially in north Alabama, but reports of singles were received from two new sites: Talladega NF, *Bibb*, 2 April (Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton), and Fernbank, *Lamar*, 28 May (Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton).
- SANDHILL CRANE** – Casual in the WP, one was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 13 May (Lenny Fenimore). The first Alabama record of Mississippi Sandhill Cranes from the Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR breeding program was set by seven immature birds at Irvington, *Mobile*, 23-29 May (G. Deakle).
- AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** – Very rare in the WP, three records were received: one in downtown Pensacola, *Escambia*, 11 April (Cheryl Bunch); three at Bayou Grande, Pensacola, *Escambia*, 20 April (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Ann Forster, Dan Forster, Betsy Tetlow, Gary Briece); and one at Destin, *Okaloosa*, 1 May (Patrick Gault).
- BLACK-NECKED STILT** – One was seen at Donovan Lake, Marion, *Perry*, during

the last week of April (Thomas Wilson) (rare for inland Alabama).

**WHIMBREL** – Twenty-seven was a good number at Grand Bay, *Mobile*, 25 April (Linda Reynolds *et al.*), where this species is becoming regular in good numbers in spring.

**WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER** – Damien Simbeck tallied 14 west of Florence, *Lauderdale*, and near Leighton, *Colbert*, 8 May to tie the maximum number for the Tennessee Valley.

**BAIRD'S SANDPIPER** – Three was a good number at Bayou La Batre, *Mobile*, 13 April (Steve McConnell, Lorna West) (rare in spring in Alabama).

**BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER** – Rare in the WP, four were at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 20 April (Mac Myers, Bob Duncan); a single was at the same site 20 May (Bob Duncan, Will Duncan).

**SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** – Early singles were at Donnegan Slough, *Colbert*, and Swan Creek WMA, *Limestone*, 24 March (Damien Simbeck). Twenty-eight was a good number (second highest for Tennessee Valley) in the Decatur area, *Limestone*, 14 May (Greg Jackson).

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** – The third and fourth records for the WP were set by singles, both 20 May, in northern *Escambia* (Laura Catterton) and at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa* (Will Duncan).

**LAUGHING GULL** – One was spotted at Decatur, *Morgan*, 3 May (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson) where the species is rare.

**FRANKLIN'S GULL** – Linda Reynolds found one at Guntersville, *Marshall*, 17 April (rare).

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** – An immature was on the east end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 14 April (Jeff Wilson, Steve McConnell, m.ob.) where the species is rare.

**CASPIAN TERN** – A single was at Spring Creek, *Lawrence*, 24 March (Damien Simbeck) (earliest record for inland Alabama).

**FORSTER'S TERN** – Along the Tennessee River in the Decatur area, *Limestone/Morgan*, 95 were counted 14 May (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson) to establish a maximum spring number for inland Alabama.

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** – The third record for the Mountain Region was set by one at Guin, *Marion*, 4-5 April (Don Wooldridge, *vide* Jud Johnston). Bill Summerour had good numbers at Silverhill, *Baldwin*, with 25+ in the winter of 2005-2006 and 12+ in mid-April.

**BURROWING OWL** – Eighteen were counted on a 23 April survey of Site B-70, Eglin AFB, *Okaloosa* (Lenny Fenimore), location of the only known colony in the WP.

**WHIP-POOR-WILL** – Rare documentation of nesting for this species came from Skyline WMA, *Jackson*, 19-21 May, where Eric Soehren found a female at a nest with two young (ph.). One heard at Bakerhill, *Barbour*, 26 May (Don Ware) marked the southernmost possible breeder in Alabama.

- CHIMNEY SWIFT** – Two+ at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 12 March (Carolyn Snow, Phil Snow) tied the early arrival record for inland Alabama.
- OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER** – A single was noted at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, *Jefferson*, 13 May (Helen Kittinger, Ty Keith), where the species is rare but regular. Another single at Grove Oak, *Marshall*, 27 May (Steve McConnell; ph.) was rare and late.
- WILLOW FLYCATCHER** – This species is rarely detected in Alabama and is a casual breeder, with only a single nesting confirmation in the state. A probable nesting record was marked by a singing bird in the Masterson SW BBA block, *Lawrence*, found 28 May (Paul Kittle) and 3 June (Rick Waldrop).
- ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER** – Rare but regular in the WP, one was spotted at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 16 March (Mac Myers, Bob Duncan).
- WESTERN KINGBIRD** – Singles were spotted at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 5 May (Bob Duncan), and at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 16 May (Bob Duncan) (very rare in spring in the WP). Also rare in Alabama in spring, two were noted at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 11 May (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow, Mac Myers).
- GRAY KINGBIRD** – This flycatcher has been rare in Alabama since 1997, but appears to be making a slow comeback. At Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, three were found 6-7 May and one 11 May (Bob Duncan, Michael Jordan, Eva Barnett *et al.*).
- SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER** – A rare but increasing breeder in the Tennessee Valley, a pair was noted nesting in a pine tree on the Alabama A&M farm, Hazel Green, *Madison*, 6 May (Ken Ward, NABS), a site where the species has previously nested.
- YELLOW-THROATED VIREO** – One found singing at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 14 March (Carolyn Snow), marked an early arrival date for inland Alabama.
- TREE SWALLOW** – Rare but increasing as a breeder in Alabama, records were received from three new sites: a pair nesting in a Purple Martin gourd, Vandiver, *Shelby*, early May (Bart Stevens); 14+ including fledglings at Priceville, *Morgan*, 27 May (Paul Franklin *et al.*); and a single at May's Bend, Lake Logan Martin, *St. Clair/Tallapoosa*, 27 May (John Imhof, William Ratliff).
- NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** – An early bird was at Magnolia Springs, *Baldwin*, 7 March (Bob Duncan, Mac Myers).
- CLIFF SWALLOW** – One at Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 11 March (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow, Peggy Baker) marked an early record for the Gulf Coast. In the Beulah CE BBA block, *Coffee/Geneva*, a colony of nesting birds was recorded 28 May (Shirley Ducharme, Frank Ducharme). The latter record documents the continued expansion of the species in Alabama and represents the southernmost nesting occurrence for inland Alabama.
- CAVE SWALLOW** – Rare but seen with increasing frequency in the WP, singles were found at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 12 March (Bob Duncan); Destin, *Okaloosa*, 30 March (Barry Fleming); Site B-70, Eglin AFB, *Okaloosa*, 8 May (Lenny

Fenimore); and FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 10 May (Bob Duncan, Mac Myers). One at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 8 April (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent *et al.*) was the first banded in Alabama, where the species is rare but regular in spring. Another single was noted on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 28 April (John Porter).

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** – One was late at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 3 May (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson).

**GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH** – Twenty was a good number on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 13 May (David Dortch, Carrie Dortch).

**AMERICAN ROBIN** – A singing male was recorded at Grand Bay, *Mobile*, 29 May (Rick West) (casual nesting this far south).

**NASHVILLE WARBLER** – Rare in spring in Alabama, an early bird was found at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 31 March (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent *et al.*; b.). Milton Harris counted five at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 3 May to establish a new maximum spring count for Alabama.

**NORTHERN PARULA** – One found by Bob Sargent at Pell City, *St. Clair*, 12 March marked an early arrival date for the Mountain Region.

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** – Lorna West noted two singing males at Opelika, *Lee*, 1 May (rare inland).

**TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** – An adult male, the first recorded from Alabama, was seen at the Dauphin Island Sanctuary, *Mobile*, 8 April (Howard Horne, Sarah Whitfield, Cindy McDonald; @ABRC).

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** – An early arrival record for the Gulf Coast of Alabama was marked by one on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 8 April (Bailey McKay *et al.*).

**WORM-EATING WARBLER** – Two early arrivals were on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 23 March (David Dortch, Carrie Dortch).

**LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH** – An early spring arrival was along the Cahaba River, *Shelby*, 13 March (Helen Kittinger).

**MOURNING WARBLER** – Rare but regular in spring in Alabama, three records (all singles) were received from *Jackson*: Estill Fork, 15 May (Bert Harris *et al.*); near Paint Rock, 17 May (Bert Harris *et al.*); and Skyline WMA, 19-21 May (Eric Soehren, m.ob.).

**HOODED WARBLER** – An early male was on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 12 March (David Dortch).

**WILSON'S WARBLER** – As well as being rare in spring in Alabama, one male was early on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 26 March (Kevin Boles, Jerry Hoffman).

**LARK SPARROW** – Locally uncommon and gradually increasing as a breeder in the Tennessee Valley, Rick Waldrop counted seven (good number) in the Leighton area, *Colbert*, 27 May, and noted a single south of Courtland, *Lawrence*, on the same date. Three were counted on the Alabama A&M farm, Hazel Green, *Madison*, 6 May (Ken Ward, NABS).

**GRASSHOPPER SPARROW** – Rarely recorded as a migrant in the Mountain Region, a window casualty furnished a record for Birmingham, *Jefferson*, 4 April

(Greg Harber; ph.). Two were singing north of Opelika, *Lee*, 13 May (Lorna West) where the species is a locally rare breeder.

**PAINTED BUNTING** – Very rare in May in the WP, a singing male was found at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 17 May (Bob Duncan).

**YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** – One female-type was recorded from Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 4 March (Howard Horne, m.ob.), where the species is rare. Occasional for inland Alabama, an adult male was found at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 19 March (Tofer Dudley, Larry Gardella *et al.*).

**SHINY COWBIRD** – Still very rare in the WP, a male was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 10 May (Mac Myers, Bob Duncan). Also rare in Alabama, another male was spotted at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 7 May (Bob Duncan, Michael Jordan, Eva Barnett).

**BALTIMORE ORIOLE** – Several singing males and one nest were noted at Livingston, *Sumter*, 17+ May (Eric Soehren, Mary Holycross) (erratic breeder in Alabama).

**RED CROSSBILL** – The continued presence of this species at its only known breeding site in Alabama (Coleman Lake area, Talladega NF, *Cleburne*) was confirmed by the eight seen 4 March (Ken Ward, NABS).

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