

REGIONAL WINGBEATS

THE DECATUR LOCALITY—With the coming of fall, the Valley changed its colors and changed its birds. The early-arriving shorebird flight seemed normal, with numbers of yellowlegs and various members of the sandpiper group dropping in to the early-exposed mudflats along the edges of the Wheeler reservoir. David Hulse spotted a group of three Willets on September 4 and a Ruddy Turnstone on September 16. Bishop Gaines, who keeps several martin boxes in his yard in Decatur, set about establishing a late date for these birds and noted the last on September 19. Dove nesting dragged well into the early fall, with a nest and eggs reported on September 27.

Blue-winged Teal, the vanguard of the waterfowl flight, began arriving in late August and numbers seemed a bit higher than during the fall of 1958. Other waterfowl began dropping in during September. As predicted, the duck flight was short and Wheeler Refuge, by early December, had tallied a peak of only 30,000, a drop of 25 per cent below last fall's high count. Canada Goose numbers, though, were encouraging, and the Refuge racked up a high count of 62,000, a 15 per cent increase over this same time last year.

On October 18, 19, and 20, a spectacular mass migration of Blue Geese and Snow Geese passed over the Decatur locality. Flock after flock, at about 15-minute intervals, moved over flying so high that their shrill squealing was scarcely audible. Flocks were mainly Blues, with only a few Snows mixed in. The course was southwest, toward their ancestral winter home at the mouth of the Mississippi. While most of these birds passed through, a full thousand wavies stopped on Wheeler Refuge and have stayed throughout the remainder of the fall.

A trio of White Pelicans was seen on the Refuge on November 5, and a quartet of Horned Grebes on November 21. A few eagles have been sighted, but, so far, they're definitely less numerous than they were last fall. Numbers of cormorants and loons have been seen or reported. Vultures, rare here in recent years, seem a bit more numerous this fall.

Several interesting cases of albinism have been noted recently. A Canada Goose with almost pure white wings has been seen several times. A white duck, presumably a Mallard, was sighted flying with a flock of normal Mallards. A Decatur resident reported a pure white grackle feeding with a flock of normal grackles in his front yard.

The entire blackbird group has increased dramatically here. Swarms of these birds are making grain sorghum growing a near impossibility in this part of the Valley. A huge roost is located just west of Decatur's Lakeview Park, with tens of thousands of Starlings, Redwings, Grackles, Cowbirds, and Rusty Blackbirds forming a black blanket over trees and brush each late evening.

—Thomas Z. Atkeson
Hdg. Wheeler Wildlife Refuge
Decatur, Ala.

THE HUNTSVILLE AREA—EVENING GROSBEAKS—On November 21, 1959, a flock of 14 Evening Grosbeaks (3 adult males, 11 females or immatures) was seen feeding in Tulip trees in the picnic and playground areas of Monte Sano State Park near Huntsville. Though Evening Grosbeaks were assumed to winter here, none had been sighted despite searches made for them by the writers for the past three years.

KRIDER'S HAWK—A Krider's Hawk sighted at Huntsville on October 24, 1959, was the first seen in the Madison County area in three years of observation by the writers. This individual was first sighted at a considerable distance, and apparently was being annoyed by a small flock of Starling which would alternately wheel toward the hawk, then away. After having his fill of the game, the hawk alighted on a power

pole approximately 50 yards north of the Highway 72 cutoff near Highway 231. From the road the following observations were made: white forehead; white nape; dark line through the eye; mottled brown and white crown, wings, and back; white throat, breast, belly and undertail; snowy white rump and tail; brownish tips to tail feathers. In consideration of size, coloration and general appearance, the hawk was judged to be a Krider's.

TRICHOMONAS GALLINAE IN MOURNING DOVES—An adult Mourning Dove trapped and banded on April 20, 1959, was found clear of this disease. On September 22, 1959, the writers had their first return on this bird, and found in its throat two cheese-like growths smaller than the head of a pin. The dove was trapped several times daily until September 27, 1959. At this time the throat and bill were bulging with growths. The throat opening was so small that the bird could pick up only the smallest of the seeds in the trap and was unable to swallow these. The crop was empty. The writers were having so many repeats on doves that trapping was halted on September 27 because of the damage being done to the birds' wings. It is assumed that the dove could have lived only a few days after September 27. From these records it appears the bird would have died within about a week of the time the very small growths were first observed.

—James and Margaret Robinson
1701 Oakwood Ave., N. E.
Huntsville, Alabama

HIGHLIGHTS FROM A GADSDEN HILLTOP—I try to check first arrivals of winter residents in the same area every year. Rare visitors such as Evening Grosbeaks are an exception. This year I was in Kentucky until the last week of September, but starting in October I had:

- October 12—First winter residents, White-throated Sparrow and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (later than usual)
- October 18—Golden-crowned Kinglet (earlier than usual), Cedar Waxwings (earlier than usual), Myrtle Warbler (about average time).
- 18—Wilson's Plover at Ashley Lake
- 27—Red-breasted Nuthatch (now daily at feeder)
- November 3—Junco (latest date I've had for them)
- 3—Purple Finches (early by a few days)
- 17—Fox Sparrow and Song Sparrow (both later than usual)
- 30—Pine Siskin (also late)
- December 5—Brown Creeper (Very late, but daily visitor since arrival)
- 2—Katherine Bates called to report one female Evening Grosbeak.
- 10—Katherine Bates reported a flock of "about 20" Evening Grosbeaks

So far, I've had only a few Purple Finches. Doves are very scarce. I'm usually feeding 15-25 at this time. This week I've had only one each day. At no time this fall have I fed more than four.

After Christmas, I shall check the returned winter residents wearing bands. Thus far, I have noticed Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and Junco with bands.

—Edith Clark (Mrs. Ben)
2736 Hilltop Circle
Gadsden, Alabama

BIRMINGHAM—October followed September with continued slightly above average temperature and rainfall. Although many species arrived "on time," migration was later this fall, possibly due to the continued warm weather. However, the first freeze occurred November 7 and November temperature and rainfall were both below normal.

On August 28, there was a group of water birds migrating on Lake Purdy: Green and Black-crowned Night Herons (immature), Little Blue Herons, Pied-billed Grebe, Black Terns, and Pectoral Sandpipers. The first Baltimore Oriole appeared August 29. A Canada Warbler was seen September 16. The first real migration wave the writer noted was on September 30 with a number of Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Black-throated Green, and Chestnut-sided Warblers. Except for the Bay-breasted, this was not the earliest arrival date for these warblers.

On November 1, a Stilt Sandpiper was feeding on Lake Purdy and was noted again on November 4 by Marge Ayres. On November 3, Idalene Snead and Lois McCullough observed a late Common Nighthawk. A Bay-breasted Warbler was seen on November 4. The Wrights and the Ayres saw four Common Snipe, one Common Loon, 400 Coot, and 15 Lesser Scaup at Lake Purdy. Gayle and Pat Riley had a female Evening Grosbeak visit their feeder on November 21.

Some arrival dates of interest —

September 21—Scarlet Tanager
24—Rose-breasted Grosbeak
October 15—White-throated Sparrow
20—Hermit Thrush.

— Harriett H. Wright (Mrs. D. O.)
2749 Millbrook Rd.
Birmingham 9, Ala

MONTGOMERY AREA AND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

November and December were good months for observing uncommon birds in south Alabama. Worthy of mention were three short-eared Owls wintering on Prison farm No. 4, approximately five miles north of Montgomery. These owls were first seen during early November and have remained there throughout December. A tremendous number of Marsh Hawks and Buteo hawks (mostly Red-tailed Hawks) were also present during this period.

High populations of Rice and Cotton Rats were undoubtedly responsible for holding such a large number of hawks during the fall and winter months.

One Harlan's Hawk was observed on the prison farm by R. W. Skinner during the latter part of November and another Harlan's Hawk was seen in the black belt section of Marengo County, approximately six miles southeast of Thomaston, Alabama, December 15, 1959 by the reporter.

Seven Sandhill Cranes were seen flying toward Elberta, in Baldwin County, on December 16, 1959, by the reporter. These birds are known to range between Elberta and the inter-coastal canal east of Gulf Shores, Alabama. A resident of the area was contacted and he stated that there was a total of 14 Sandhill Cranes in that area this fall.

A total of 135 recent band recoveries was reported to the Alabama Department of Conservation during December. Most of these birds were recovered from September 1, to November 15, 1959. These recoveries were as follows: Mourning Dove—90; Mallard—21; Black Duck—13; Canada Goose—5; Baldpate—4; Little-blue Heron—1; White, Ibis—1.

Of special interest was the White Ibis recovery. This bird was banded as a nestling in Baldwin County, Alabama, June 21, 1956 and caught August 30, 1959, near San Nicholas de Bari, Havana, Cuba.

— James E. Keeler
State Conservation Dept.
Montgomery, Ala.

THE AUBURN AREA—Notes from eastern Alabama are hard to separate from neighboring Georgia, especially when the events take place only several miles over the line. The Columbus, Georgia, L. A. Wells watched a pair of Mississippi Kites nest and rear one young right in Columbus. The nest was no more than 100 feet from a row of houses. They were first seen May 10 and left August 18. Read more about this in the Oriole, the G. O. S. publication. A second Georgia note was an announcement from Mrs. J. H. Whiteman at West Point. She reports that the noted resort Ida Cason Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, has added an ornithologist, Mr. Winslow M. Shaughnessy, to its staff and that Mr. Shaughnessy is to develop a program of bird study for the area. This should be of great interest to those in Eastern Alabama. We hope Mr. Shaughnessy will become an A. O. S. member.

This fall, being much more moist than usual and mild, has produced a much more interesting migration. With the moisture and more available food, migrants stopped and stayed awhile. As a result, it was actually worth while spending some time in the field netting, banding and collecting.

GOLDEN PLOVER NEAR AUBURN

This fall a number of the experimental ponds of the Agriculture Experiment Station at Auburn University were drained as experiments were completed. This provided an unusual increase in mud flats which are an attraction to migrating shore-birds. As a result the writer collected a female Golden Plover, *Pluvialis d. dominica*, on November 9, 1959. This was a lone individual associated with a number of Killdeers, several Greater Yellowlegs and several Least Sandpipers. There also were several Common Snipes present.

The collection was of interest to the writer because it is the only specimen to his knowledge to be seen or taken near Auburn.

— Julian L. Dusi
P. O. Box 742
Auburn, Ala.

GOLDEN PLOVER NEAR AUBURN

MOBILE AND THE GULF COAST—In any area, one of the prerequisites for abundant bird-life is an ample food supply. Reports and personal observation in Mobile, Baldwin, Washington, Clark and Monroe Counties indicate an unusually bad season for bird food. Our berry, seed, and mast crop, with scattered exceptions, is very poor. Pecan and acorn crops were the worst in many years. The same is true of cherry-laurel, chinaberry, holly, gum, and cedar.

On the brighter side, however, grass seeds are locally abundant, as is insect life. Likewise, shore birds will have no food problem along the salt-water mud flats.

It will be interesting to see whether this food scarcity is reflected in our annual Christmas bird counts. It probably will not show in the Dauphin Island count as that particular area is not as badly affected.

Waterfowl:

The Fall flight of geese was greater than usual and they have remained in the Mobile area longer than usual. Most were Blue Geese, with a few Snow and Canada Geese seen.

Ducks are not as plentiful as last year. Canvasbacks, Redheads, and Ruddy Ducks had such a bad breeding season that the bag limit was wisely cut to one per day.

To cite the value of food supply to bird life, I recently flew to the Texas rice area for the opening of geese and duck hunting. In one protected area geese were so numerous that their calls when disturbed, sounded like the roar at the Alabama-Auburn football game. There were tens of thousands in sight. Let's keep trying to get Coffee Island made into a U. S. Wildlife Refuge. It would not only attract ducks and geese, but also the wonderful bird-life rapidly being crowded off Dauphin Island.

— M. W. Gaillard, DDS
1508 Merchants Nat. Bank Bldg.
Mobile, Ala.