

REGIONAL WINGBEATS

Decatur, Alabama - November 13, 1962: August through November was dry with only irregular showers, and little of the spectacular where birds are concerned. The cattle egrets that nested locally during the spring were not seen after July 26. Again, the Iranian pheasants stocked on the Swan Creek Public Hunting Area were reported to have brought off broods and, on November 7, Jim Keeler released 91 of these exotic birds on the White Springs islands, to give them the advantage of the additional protection offered by Wheeler Refuge. A few days later a similar group was added to those already present on the Swan Creek Area.

Few bird notes fell outside the range of those previously recorded. David Hulse noted least terns through September 8, a few days later than formerly. On September 21, a couple of knots dropped onto the levee of the Decatur boat harbor and were so ridiculously tame that they wandered into the concession building. On September 29, David spotted a lone Hudsonian curlew, pardon us -- a whimbrel -- poking along the shore line of the north river bank opposite Decatur. On November 7, Jim Keeler saw a Swinson hawk near Hartselle. There were no reports of Trichomoniasis among doves, and both dove and quail numbers seem up a bit.

Canada geese first circled Wheeler Refuge and slanted in for a landing on September 16, about on schedule. However, all waterfowl numbers reflect the continental shortage. Top counts to date stand at 23,000 Canada geese, 600 blue geese, 60 snow geese and 20,000 ducks of all species. Comparing these figures with Wheeler Refuge counts last fall indicates a drop of approximately one-third in both Canada goose and duck numbers, a 15 percent drop in blue geese and no change among the saintly-looking snow geese. However, migration is still underway, and the woes and snows of winter may yet send some record waterfowl numbers to the South in general and to Wheeler Refuge in particular.

For 24 years, Wheeler Refuge has bragged that it is the only National Refuge located in Alabama. Wheeler now has a younger sister, the Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge, located along the Tombigbee River, near Jackson. This new refuge - a four thousand acre area - may some day rival Wheeler in

the variety of its birdlife and may well be the objective of some of our meetings and field trips.

Thomas Z. Atkeson

Auburn - Most noteworthy is the occurrence of a Red-breasted Nuthatch at Auburn on October 21st. Also on the same day, I observed the first white-throated sparrows of the season. A cold front had moved into this area producing damp, chilly, misty weather and quite probably these birds had moved in with the front.

Dr. Good reports that the Red-breasted Nuthatch record is the first for the Auburn vicinity since April 1, 1926, at which time he observed both the white-breasted and red-breasted at Auburn.

It is interesting to note that the cold front on October 20 and 21 which moved into this area bringing with it a marked influx of birds occurred the weekend the A.O.S. meeting was held at Dauphin Island. Possibly a record comparison of species might indicate this front.

Other observations are:

1. first Myrtle Warbler - October 20 - 40 degrees F.
2. first Ruby-crowned Kinglet - October 16 - 85 degrees F.
3. Black-throated Green Warbler - October 14
4. March Hawk - first seen September 16
5. Chestnut-sided Warblers common - September 17
6. Tennessee Warblers common - September 19 - October 1. Popular trends indicated with cold fronts.
7. first Rose-breasted Grosbeak - September 25 (last seen October 9)
8. Swanson's Thrush frequent between September 21 - September 30.

All above observations noted within city limits of Auburn.

Charles W. Summerour
937 Old Mill Road
Auburn, Alabama

Grove Hill - The last of a large migration of Ruby-throated humming birds passed through Grove Hill November 4th.

Turk's Caps furnished late nectar to refuel them for their long southern trek.

Geo. Carlton

Mobile - Cold weather to the north increased migration during early November. Large flights of ducks and few Blue Geese rode in on a strong north wind.

Ten Avocets were back on Cochrane Causeway November 4th.

Lib & Henry Toenes

Doves are numerous along new Belt-line recently seeded in clover and grass.

A Western Tanager was seen on Spring Hill College campus by Fr. Dorn. Bob White are much more numerous.

Kathleen & Harry Johnstone

Talladega - Wood Thrushes seem to have been more abundant here this year, nesting in residential areas very close to business district as well as in woods.

Blue Grosbeak nested in a walnut tree in our yard in 1959. On June 20 this year, I found a Blue Grosbeak nesting in a box-elder just across the driveway from the walnut tree. I had put up a hammock between the box-elder and a gum tree which the children used quite often. On July 6 the Grosbeak was still on the nest, about seven feet from the hammock, but the nest was soon deserted due probably to the noise. Some weeks later when the leaves began to fall, I discovered a nest about six feet higher in the same box-elder. It was made of the same material as the Grosbeak's nest and the same size. So I think it is safe to assume the Grosbeaks gave up the first nest and built higher to obtain more privacy.

On July 10, a Veery flew into our bedroom window and was killed. Our hawk migration was disappointing this year although white-eyed Vireos and Bluebirds were plentiful.

Common crows are here in flocks of 75 to 125.

Cecil Hornady
The Talladega Daily Home

Dauphin Island - About 200 doves are feeding in Sanctuary food patches, including many White-winged doves.

Nine Blue Geese seen in lake and on new golf course.

Cattle egrets becoming common.

Hundreds of fat Robins feasting on ripe gum berries. Also Gray-cheeked thrush and veeries.

Eight Western Kingbirds passed through November 1.

Alice Patterson
Mary Gaillard
Fr. Dorn

More than 75 Bluebirds counted 11/18/62.

Joe Friedhoff
Max McGill
Wilson Gaillard

Pensacola, Fla. - "Dear Dr. Gaillard: Many thanks for your cordial invitation for our local group to join you on your land-sea-air Xmas Bird Count on Dauphin Island on the last Saturday in December. As it happens, that is the only day that we can get our whole group together for our Xmas Count here, and we cannot abandon our plans nor change them. Otherwise, I am sure that our whole group would gladly accept your invitation.

As for fall migration observations, I cannot understand how you would be interested in observations on this side of our State lines. I am the only one of our group that has made a trip into Alabama. I was on the Mobile Causeway last Saturday, November 3, and the only item of interest that I saw there was a single White Ibis - very late for that species. However, I see in Imhof's book that you have the White Ibis even later than that, so my observation would hardly interest you.

West-bound hawk migration was very poor this fall. Instead of flights of hundreds of birds that we usually see, there were only two very small flights -- 19 birds on September 25 and 10 birds on October 5 -- all of them Red-shouldered Hawks. They were seen here before noon on both days and undoubtedly crossed southern Alabama on the same days. There has been a notable flight of Western Kingbirds -- 10 birds yesterday, November 5, and 12 birds today, November 6. They certainly came to us after having crossed southern Alabama, and therefore may be of interest to you.

Francis M. Weston
2006 E. Jordon St.
Pensacola, Fla.

Editor's Note: To better trace flights of migrants which come down Alabama's great river system, cooperation was requested of our fine birders in Pensacola and the Mississippi coast. Large flights of geese and ducks reach our Gulf coast and finding little food and safety move either eastward to St. Marks Refuge or westward to Louisiana. Our neighbors can assist by checking these coastal movements.

likewise, these observers can alert us of western migrants, as was the case of a flight of Western Kingbirds. On October 30, Western Kingbirds were seen near Pascagoula. On November 1 eight W. Kingbirds were checked in one area on Dauphin Is. and on November 5th, ten Western Kings - presumably the same group - were reported in Pensacola, Fla. Thank you good neighbors!)

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1963 A.O.S. dues are due January 1st. Dues paid by new members joining at, or since, our October Fall meeting will be considered as 1963 dues.

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Did you secure a new A.O.S. member last year?

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OBSERVATIONS OF A BLACKBIRD ROOST

Of special interest was a blackbird roost, in an area of bamboo study plots, with an estimated 800,000 individuals. The composition of the group using this roosting area was made by carefully observing the smaller groups of birds as they came into the roosting area, determining the composition of these groups and then arriving at a total by counting the number of groups that came in to roost. It was a carefully made estimation, not just a guess.

On January 25 through 29, two Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, Robert T. Mitchell and Don Frankhauser, who are part of the group of biologists currently studying the blackbird depredation problem, set up their trap-net in the roost area and trapped and banded a portion of the roosting population. Over the several day period, more than nine thousand birds were captured and of these 4,108 were banded. Of those caught: 6,505 were Starlings, 152 Redwinged Blackbirds, 1,650 Brown-headed Cowbirds, 733 Grackles and 408 Rusty Blackbirds. Starlings and cowbirds are apparently most greatly attracted by the lights in the night-operated trap-net and the capture figures bear this out. Thus even though a pretrapping estimate indicated a large number of Redwinged Blackbirds present, only 152 were captured.

From the numbers captured, banded, and recaptured, an index to the total population was computed. This indicated that the population contained 252,119 Starlings, 3,672 Redwinged Blackbirds, 613,608 B.-h. Cowbirds, 104,600 Common Grackles and 20,210 Rusty Blackbirds: a total of 974,209 individuals.

The difference between the estimates and those from the trapping and banding figures shows considerable variation for the Starling, Cowbird, and Redwinged Blackbird populations. These may be explained by several factors. The difference in time, while not great, is enough for a small flock composition variation. The placement of the trap-net might have been such that it was centered nearer the areas occupied by Starlings and Cowbirds and was away from the other bird concentrations. This would have increased the probability of catching many Starlings and Cowbirds as was done and make more difficult the capture of Redwinged Blackbirds. Finally, the light attraction factor is an important