

THE SEASON SUMMER 1970

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A season is always easier to evaluate a year later, yet everyone wants his news while it is still new. This is because the reader that receives his information quickly can still see the effects of what he reads about and can act on the news he gets.

The communication channel works about like this. The local observer reports his bird records to a local compiler where possible, such as Mary Gaillard, Curtis Kingsbery, or Andy Bates. Some of these local compilers in turn produce a local season column such as "Sight On Sound Off" or the Mobile Club's "Observations". Your state compiler makes a summary of these season columns, of letters he receives direct from some observers, of remarks, phone calls, and any other method of receiving bird records: then produces a season column like this one of records and remarks of interest to the bird people of Alabama. A copy of this column is forwarded to the Central Southern Region Editor who extracts records of regional or national interest, combines them with records from Arkansas, Northwest Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and most of Tennessee, and submits it to Audubon Field Notes for publication. The Changing Seasons Editor of Audubon Field Notes receives reports from each of 20 Regions and combines them into a picture of the birdlife for one season for 49 of the states (except Hawaii) and the southern half of Canada.

This whole information structure depends on the local observer, who reports what he sees accurately and promptly, and on an editor, who is an observer willing to sacrifice some of his field time for a lot of desk time. Then, if all the observers, editors, printers, mailmen, etc. work right, each bird student knows what his buddy in the next town, or county, or state is seeing soon enough for the information to be useful to him.

During the summer season, the Breeding Bird Survey gathers a larger fund of significant information on birds than any other project. It is a shame that the very magnitude of the project prevents us from taking advantage of this information quickly enough for the summer season report. What we need is a computer that fills out its own forms, programs itself, types its own instructions, and is available free to bird watchers.

The weather continues a five-year trend of negatives—departures from normal temperature and precipitation are below normal. June with 3.7" below average was the coolest summer month, in large part due to drizzling, overcast weather. It was a dry month in spite of the 1.53-inch rain of the 2nd. August had 2.16 inches above normal precipitation due in large part to 2.99 in. on the 9th and 1.64 in. on the 10th. Since then signs of dryness show in shallow-rooted plants and ground pools. We have so destroyed our ability to take advantage of these heavy rains that we often live in drought conditions when we should not. Huge areas of highway, parking lot, filled-in swamp, channelized stream, and felled tree have robbed the land of its sponge-like ability to store water from drenching rains and release it gradually in dry periods.

The effect of all this weather on breeding birds cannot as yet be determined. However it is probably true that the more normal the weather, not only of the breeding season but of the preceding year, the more normal the production of young.

Loons, Grebes, Pelicanlike Birds—Com Loons at Lake Oliver, near Phenix City, on 30 May (JM) and at East Lake, B'ham on 31 May (GCC) are the latest definite spring migrants for the state. One on 28 June near Lock 17, Black Warrior R. (DDJr) was most likely summering locally. Of the regularly summering Pied-billed Grebes, at least 3 pair were known to produce young this year. Two

were in Baldwin County, families seen on 9 Aug. (LPA, LRT, PFC, VDH); and 1 with 3 young at Marion 22 June through 3 July (RRR, JRB). A few White Pelicans summer just about every year on the coast; this year 1 on Mobile Causeway on 14 July (JLD) and at Pointe-aux-Pines) 14 on 9 June and 8 on 12 June (DCH). After an estimated 50 roosting near Sand Is. this spring, word on the Brown Pelican is definitely encouraging; on Dauphin Is. 5 to 20 throughout the period (G&JS, LRT); at Fort Morgan, 65 counted on 12 Aug. (HMS). A Brown Booby in Mississippi Sound on 18 June (DCH) is the 4th Alabama record (now recorded in April, June, July, & Aug.)

Hérons, Ibises—A partial albino Great Blue Heron on Mobile Causeway on 14 July had the same color bill and feet as a nearby normal adult bird, but except for a pinkish wash on its upper legs it was all white (JLD). Peak numbers of waders at Lake Purdy near B'ham this summer were, except for the first species, record highs for the Mt. Region Green Heron, 11 on 19 July (RRR); Little Blue Heron, 56 on 8 Aug. (RRR, KTK); Com Egret, 11 on 19 July (JRB); and Yellow-crowned Night Heron, 27 on 1 Aug (RRR). Cattle Egret concentrations were noted at Marion, 20 on 3 July (RRR & JRB); Bayou La Batre, 200 on 6 July (DCH); near Castleberry, about 400 young fledged from about 150 nests on 15 Aug. (CLK, AFW, T&AF). Although Yellow-crowned Night Herons were in good numbers around Birmingham, even in the middle of Mt. Brook (on 29 July--LMB), the birds were rather slow in reaching the coast from nearby nesting areas (MAG); first noted on Dauphin on 23 June (LRT). A Wood Stork at Lake Purdy, 19 to at least 31 Aug. (HHW, PAR and many) is the 3rd Mt. Region record, all from Purdy. In Portersville Bay, near Coden, on 2 July, 255 White Ibis were counted (DCH); 50 were seen in Baldwin County on 9 Aug. (LPA); 59 young and 4 adults were in the Castleberry rookery on 15 Aug. (CLK, AFW, T&AF); and one at Lake Purdy, 18 through 31 Aug. (GCC and many) is the 6th summer record there and also the latest.

Ducks—One Black Duck remained through the summer on a pond near Fairhope (LPA, et al.) First-noted Blue-winged Teal were early on 9 Aug. in Baldwin County (LPA, LRT). Wood Duck used 10 of the 80 boxes erected for them on Wheeler, Refuge (TZA); 40 birds were noted at Bussey's Pond just south of Phenix City (JM); 2 broods of fledged young were near Castleberry on 14 June (CLK et al.); 60 were counted at Chickasaw on 14 July (JLD); and 11 fully-feathered young were near Fairhope on 19 June (VDH). For at least the 7th successive year, Ring-necked Ducks, mostly males, have summered at East Lake, B'ham; this year 3 males were noted throughout the period and a 4th male on 10 May (RRR, GCC, et al.) The Oldsquaw reported from Dauphin on 27 March was actually present 25-30 Mar. (LRT). A male Com Scoter which summered in Mississippi Sound and apparently spent much of its time on Petit Bois Is (18 June, DCH), was photographed (TT)--no specimen as yet--and may well have been the late bird seen on Dauphin on 25 April. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is encouraging the hunting of sea ducks, often neglected in the past, in order to ease the pressure on other waterfowl. This should mean more summering records of sea ducks.

Hawks—Kites continue to do well, and 1 or 2 Mississippi are seen daily throughout the summer in Spring Hill, Mobile (MAG). At Bay Minette on 29 June, 4 Swallow-tailed and 7 Mississippi were seen (A&NG). Most other hawks are universally reported scarce with two possible bright spots, the Broad-winged and Sparrow, down but not decimated. All 4 species are mainly large insect and reptile eaters, and are probably receiving a much smaller dose of pesticide than other raptors. An immature Bald Eagle was on Dauphin on 31 July (DB) and 1 Aug (LRT). This indicates a returning, locally-hatched bird, and in view of Sept. 1969 and early Oct., 1968 records of immatures at the same place, young may still be raised successfully in Alabama!

Rails--Change the date of the Yellow Rail record in the spring report from 2 to 26 April. Young Clapper Rails were noted on Dauphin on 14 July (LRT). Purple Gallinules were recorded at 2 places in Baldwin County (VDH, LPA); on Mobile Causeway (JLD); and in Covington County (CLK et al); 3 downy young Com Gallinules were near Castleberry on 14 June (CLK et al). The Am Coot is another waterbird that summers commonly in the state and apparently attempts often to breed but with little success even though its close relatives the Gallinules do well enough. This summer pairs of Am Coots were recorded throughout the period at Heron Bay (LRT, DCH); Corte Pond, Baldwin Co. (VDH); Marion (RRR & JRB); and East Lake, B'ham (RRR & GCC).

Shorebirds-- A Semipalmated Plover on Dauphin on 10 June (LRT) is most likely summering, but who can tell for certain? Either some shorebirds are faster flyers than we think or, more likely, many of them do not breed every year. The Spotted Sandpiper, like many other shorebirds, is a non-breeding permanent resident on the Gulf Coast of Alabama, but rare from June to mid-July. This year, 1 on Dauphin on 12 July (LRT) is earlier than usual. Least Sandpipers were seen in return 1 day earlier in 2 Regions: 22 July, 4 at Bussey's Pond near Phenix City (JM); and 28 July, 2 on Dauphin (LRT). A Dunlin on 1 June on Dauphin (LRT) is latest ever for spring for state by 3 days. Stilt Sandpipers early for their Regions by several weeks were on Dauphin on 4 Aug. (LRT, LMcK); and at Lake Purdy, B'ham on 23 Aug (JRB); 2nd fall record for Mt. Region. (Correct this spring's 26 May Stilt Sandpiper record from 7 to 2 birds.) A Semipalmated Sandpiper on 8 June on Dauphin (LRT) has about the same status as the Semipalmated Plover. The last line inadvertently omitted from the spring report (ABL 18:4) should read: A Black-necked Stilt at Bayou La Batre on 1 May (REH) continues a long string of annual records.

Gulls and Terns--The rainy weather of late May and early June brought a rash of gull records: Herring Gull, 2 in B'ham on 31 May (GCC) and 1 there on 3 June (HHK); Ring-billed Gull, 5 at Lake Oliver, Chattahoochee R. on 4 June (LAW); Laughing Gull at Lake Oliver, 2 adults on 22 May, 12 with rains on 1 June, and a few present daily to a final peak of 17 on 12 June (LAW)! Forster's Tern, uncommon in spring inland, was seen at Lake Oliver on 24 May (LAW); another was at Lake Purdy on 15 Aug (JRB et al.) A Sooty Tern appeared at Gulf Shores on 28 June after a storm (JGS); we now have at least 7 coastal records and 5 more inland, all associated with storms. Two late Black Terns were on Lake Oliver on 4 June (LAW).

Cuckoo, Owl, Whip-poor-will--The Yellow-billed Cuckoo was reported common on Dauphin on 7 June (LRT); more evidence of a late spring flight. The Barn Owl still lives within the city limits of Birmingham; one was seen recently killing a stray house cat (Sgt. Graham, B'ham Police). Anyone who has heard a Whip-poor-will suspects that birds must breathe differently than mammals, for birds such as the Pileated Woodpecker go a long time without losing breath. A Whip-poor-will that kept this writer awake in the Bankhead Forest on 23 May twice exceeded 300 calls without letup. Checking with Bent's Life Histories (USNM Bull 176, 1940) shows the record successive calls, noted by John Burroughs, is 1088!

Gray Kingbird, Barn Swallow--Gray Kingbirds had a successful year on the Gulf Coast; a maximum of 21 were counted on Dauphin on 11 Aug. (LRT); 5 more were counted at Fort Morgan on 12 Aug. (HMS); and 1 was even seen at Coden, on 25 Aug. (LRT). The first breeding record for Mississippi or Louisiana should come any year now. Barn Swallow nests were noted on the Mobile Causeway, under the Pineda area bridge, on 14 July (JLD), the only known new locality this year. Considerable buildup of existing colonies brought the Cedar Valley (Leeds) colony in its 5th year to 13 nests, 21 nestlings, and 83 nestlings banded (RRR, HHW, RJK, and many). The Sprott, Perry Co. colony had 18 nests, and 55 birds were counted there on 3 July (RRR & JRB). Barn Swallow totals for the 5 north

Alabama Breeding Survey Routes for which we have 5 years of data, 1966-1970 are 9, 33, 48, 83, 93--a ten-fold increase! The species has thus far been recorded on 20 of the 42 routes.

Vireo, Warblers--Data on early fall migration of the Red-eyed Vireo are difficult to obtain, thus one seen on Dauphin on 27 July (LRT) is especially interesting. Information from Dauphin outside the periods, 1 March-15 May, 25 Aug. - 10 Nov., and 20 Dec. - 3 Jan. is especially welcome. The Swainson's Warbler was recorded on at least 3 Breeding Surveys this year, Perry County (RRR & EGR), St. Clair County (HHK), and Bibb County (TAI & JMI). On 20 April 2 Black-throated Gray Warblers were on Dauphin (LRT) (See Spring Report). The Louisiana Waterthrush, noteworthy in the breeding season in the coastal plain, was seen and heard in Perry County on 6 June (RRR & EGR) and Choctaw County on 7 June (RRR & EGR). Little additional warbler data are at present available.

Finches--Blue Grosbeaks were seen south of US 90 in both coastal counties this summer, Mobile on 9 June (JLD & MAG), Baldwin on 22 July (LPA). Belated information tells us that this species and the Painted Bunting were seen in Marion the last week in March (D&RA). A Lark Sparrow at Fort Morgan on 12 Aug. (HMS) is the earliest state fall record away from the breeding range. Bachman's Sparrow (next endangered species?) has been rarely reported recently away from the pine flatwoods; 1 was singing in the rain near Vance, Tuscaloosa Co. on 30 May (TAI & JMI). A brown, poor-plumaged Whitethroat visited the Imhof bird bath but not the feeders on 1, 9, & 15 June. We now have at least 8 summers with June or July records of Whitethroats in the Mt. Region.

Observers (Local reporters in capitals)--Diane & Ray Arggle, Lois P. Archer THOMAS Z. ATKESON, JR., J. Russell Bailey, Laura M. Bailey, ANDREW K. BATES, Don Bland, Greg C. Carlisle, P. Fairly Chandler, J. L. Dom SJ, Don Drennan, Jr., Ted & Amy Fumans, MARY A. GAILLARD, Arthur & Nancy Garrett, R. E. (Tuck) Hayward, Dan C. Holliman, Verda D. Home, John M. Imhof, Thomas A. Imhof, CURTIS L. KINGSBERRY, Helen H. Kittinger, Richard J. Kittinger, Kenneth T. Knapp, Louise McKinstry, James Miller, ROBERT R. REID, JR., Elberta G. Reid, Pat A. Riley, Genevieve & Jim Spafford, Henry M. Stevenson, Julia Gaillard Suk, Lib R. Toenes, Tim Traylor, L. A. Wells, A Fred Wicke, Harriett H. Wright.

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NOTE--These Season columns cover as closely as possible four 3-month periods for each season. In order for material to be published promptly we must receive material as soon as possible but no later than the 10th of the month following each season, 10 March, 10 June, 10 Sept., and 10 Dec. Our present aim is to publish an issue of ALABAMA BIRDLIFE in the month following these deadlines (Jan., April, July, Oct.) with about 12 to 20 pages an issue and a Season column in each one. Bear in mind these dates when submitting material, especially records. If you have an observation that you think deserves more space than is given in the Season column, by all means submit a brief separate note. The success of this whole venture depends on your cooperation. Thank You.



NEST-RECORD CARDS NEEDED

At this time we would like to urge you--Regional Centers as well as individuals--to return to us any completed nest-record cards that have not been sent to the Laboratory of Ornithology. In our NEWSLETTER we will list the names of the major contributors for 1969.