

Announcement Spring Meeting  
Alabama Ornithological Society

Gulf Shores, Alabama  
April 13,14,15, 1973

The Alabama Ornithological Society is pleased to announce that the spring meeting of the society will be held at Gulf Shores on April 13,14,15, 1973. Gulf Shores is located on the gulf in Baldwin County about 50 miles southeast of Mobile. Field trips will be to many areas in the Gulf Shores area and environs including Ft. Morgan. Banders will be banding so you will be able to see the birds up close. Birding is excellent here and some authoritative experts say the best on the Alabama coast. Fairly Chandler, P. O. Box 142, Magnolia Springs, Alabama 36555, is in charge of local arrangements and is assisted by Verna Horne and Curtis Kingsbery.

#### Accommodations

Fairly Chandler recommends the following accommodations: On the beach - Holiday Inn, Gulf Shores Motel, Teh-Lu Cottages; Off the beach - Holiday Motel, Gulf Shores Cottages, Trailer Park. Write them at Gulf Shores, Alabama 36542. All rates are very reasonable away from the beach. There are camping areas available at Gulf Shores State Park and lake front cottages may be open. For park information write: Mr. G. M. McLeod, Manager, Gulf Shores State Park, Gulf Shores, Alabama 36542. For other available accommodation information write: Gulf Shores Tourist Information Center, Gulf Shores, Alabama 36542.

#### Activities

Registration will begin at 5:00 P.M. at the Ratcliff Restaurant. To get to the restaurant as you travel south on U.S. 59, cross over the canal bridge at Gulf Shores and 100 yards before the first traffic light you will see the establishment on your right. ACS directional signs will be evident. We plan to have a short program at 8:00 P.M. including a presentation on the field trips for the weekend. All information on times and places of the field trips as well as other activities will be given you when you register. For those arriving Saturday come to Ratcliff's where information will be available.

A seafood banquet and program will be Saturday evening at Ratcliff's and a compilation on Sunday. Dress as desired.

Everyone is looking for an exciting meeting and the enjoyment of exploring this area. Hope to see you.

SCENIC MOUNTAIN ROADS AND THEIR  
EFFECT ON BIRD COMMUNITIES

Richard E. Ambrose

It has long been known that the alteration of habitats affects the diversity of bird communities. The degree of change can often be correlated to the magnitude of the alteration. In our southern Appalachian mountains we have what is probably the least affected of our original woodland forests. Examples of the other extreme are the Piedmont and Coastal Plains which are today little more than a patchwork of monocultures, leaving very little evidence of the original forest biotas.

Much of our southern mountains are within the boundaries of National Forests and as such fall within their jurisdiction. In the management of these lands for "multiple use" the Forest Service has recently responded to the desires of the public for more recreational outlets. These often take the form of scenic drives placed along the crest of a major mountain range. They are designed primarily for the majority of the population who seem to be limited in their travels by the hard-surface asphalt.

A question that presents itself is whether or not the scenic mountain road traveler actually gets a true picture of this environment by the typical road construction of today. It is hoped that this paper will help the individual to decide this matter for himself, as it is primarily a question of human interpretation of environmental quality.

#### HISTORY OF THE STUDY AREA

For over a decade prior to 1970 there had been in existence in the Talladega National Forest of Alabama a narrow dirt road along Horseblock Mountain called the Skyway Motorway. As dirt roads go, this was of a fairly high quality, being well graded and periodically scraped to prevent erosion ruts from forming. The road was approximately 15-17 feet wide with a woodland border that began almost immediately at the road edge. Because of the closeness of the forest to the road, there was an almost complete overhead canopy formed by the interlacing limbs of the trees on either side of the road.

In 1970, construction was begun to "upgrade" Skyway Motorway by asphaltting and landscaping in the manner of a scenic mountain parkway. When construction was finally completed, the resulting road was of the same width, but graded to a higher degree, so as to remove many of the long up and down hill slopes. The most prominent alteration was the removal of the entire overhead canopy from the road by cutting back the forest from 30-100 feet or more on either side of the road. Also the dirt embankments formed by the grading operation were planted in soil-holding legumes, similar to those found along our freeways.

METHODS

A six mile portion of the Skyway Motorway (see Figure 1) is contained within the Sunny Eve Count (State-Providence O2); Route number 012), which is one of the routes run annually in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Cooperative Breeding Bird Survey. This author was fortunate to be compiler for 6 of the 7 years this count has been in existence, Mr. Tom Imhof being kind enough to run this route in 1967 when other obligations kept me from making the count.

As most serious students of birds are familiar with the Cooperative Breeding Bird Survey, the reader will be referred to the current regulations regarding the way in which the routes are run. This paper will only concern itself with the six mile portion of the Sunny Eve Count between stop #13 and stop #25. Table I summarizes the data and represents all birds observed from 1966-1972 along this section of the motorway.

In 1971 it was noted that with the completion of the motorway and subsequent grading that .5 mile had been lost in the process of road construction. Therefore in Table I a correction factor of X1.1 was used on the data of 1971 and 1972 to equalize the 13 stops of the last two years with the 14 stops of the first five years. During the construction in 1970 apparently 14 stops were still in existence.

To try to reduce the variance in observers in the survey, the data collected by Imhof is pooled with my data separately. So the reader can then compare Column A: four years of data, Ambrose and Imhof; with Column B: three years of data, Ambrose, both within the closed canopy woods road. A correction value of ÷ 1.33 was applied to the data in Column A to equalize these 4 years with the 3 years of data in Column B and C. Column C represents 3 years of counts by the author alone along the open canopy scenic drive.

RESULTS - DISCUSSION

Comparing Columns A and B with C, it will readily be apparent that the most significant results are those concerned with the decrease in most forest bird species, coinciding with the increase in numbers of birds associated with woods clearings. The decrease in forest birds could be due to road construction, placing the suitable habitat further from the observer, or to the general decline nationwide of these species over recent years. Whatever the reasons, with the altered populations now present, this author feels that the parkway traveler will now no longer be exposed to population numbers reflecting past densities of our woodland birds. Possibly with future road planning allowing for some road area with an overhead canopy, this situation can be improved.

Department of Zoology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.

Table I. Birds recorded on Skyway Motorway, years 1966-1972.

Species	Years							Col A	Col B	Col C
	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	Tot 66-69 Woods Rd	Tot 66-69 Woods Rd	Tot 70-72 Scenic Rd
Turkey Vulture	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	3	1
Bd.-wg. Hawk	-	2	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	2
Bobwhite	-	3	3	-	2	9	6	5	3	17
Mourning Dove	-	2	1	3	-	2	2	5	4	4
Y.-b. Cuckoo	7	3	1	-	3	3	2	8	8	8
Chimney Swift	1	1	-	-	-	1	3	2	1	4
R.-t. Humming.	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Y.-sh. Flicker	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pileated W.	-	1	4	2	1	2	-	5	6	3
Red-bel. W.	-	1	-	1	-	3	8	2	1	11
Hairy W.	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Downy W.	-	1	-	1	5	1	-	2	1	6
Gt. C. Fly.	6	3	1	1	2	8	6	8	8	16
Ea. Phoebe	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Acadian Fly.	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	1	1
Ea. Wood Pewee	-	1	-	-	2	1	-	1	-	3
Blue Jay	-	8	3	1	3	11	6	9	4	20
Common Crow	4	2	-	1	-	2	-	5	5	2
Car. Chickadee	10	3	5	7	7	7	3	19	22	17
Tuf. Titmouse	10	7	13	7	4	8	8	28	30	20
W.-br. Nuthatch	-	3	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	1
Carolina Wren	-	3	2	1	2	3	1	5	3	6
Mockingbird	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Wood Thrush	6	6	13	9	3	4	2	26	28	9
E. Bluebird	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
B.-g. Gnat.	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	-	-	5
Wh.-eyed Vireo	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-
Yellow-thr. V.	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	2	1	1
Red-eyed Vireo	13	15	5	13	6	6	6	35	31	18
Bl.&Wh. Warbler	3	3	2	2	-	-	1	8	7	1
Bl.-thr. G. Wa.	14	7	3	4	5	4	1	22	21	10
Pine Warbler	3	2	2	4	7	10	4	3	9	21
Prairie Wa.	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	2	1	2
Ovenbird	8	15	5	12	4	4	6	31	25	14
La. Waterthrush	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	4	4	-
Ky. Warbler	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	1	1
Y.-br. Chat	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	1
Br.-hd. Cowbird	-	6	-	-	-	1	3	6	6	4
Scarlet Tanager	1	2	2	3	4	4	-	6	6	8
Summer Tanager	1	3	6	1	4	7	7	8	8	18
Cardinal	1	8	5	3	5	1	3	13	9	9
Blue Grosbeak	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
Indigo Bunting	4	3	1	2	2	4	8	8	7	14
Ru.-sd. Towhee	-	3	3	4	6	3	1	8	7	10

- Note: (a) Years columns contain total number of birds sighted on 14 stops.
- (b) Column A - Total number of birds contacted 1966-1969 with the actual figure divided by 1.33 and rounded to the nearest whole number to make it comparable with three years sightings in Column B and C.
- (c) Column B - Total number of birds contacted during the three years of 1966, 1968, and 1969. Year 1967 was excluded to reduce possible variability introduced by another observer.
- (d) Column C - Total number of birds contacted during the three years between 1970 and 1972.

Table II. Weather Data for Count Periods

Date	6/3	6/6	6/13	6/11	6/12	6/5	6/3
Temp	57-72	69-85	60-79	73-82	63-76	67-87	50-89
Wind Speed	0-1	0-2	0-2	0-1	0-1	1-5	2-2
Sky Code	0-1	0-0	0-1	2-1	2-1	0-1	0-1

Note: Temperature is in degrees fahrenheit. Wind Speed utilizes the Beaufort number system. Sky codes are as follows: 0 - Clear, 1 - Partly cloudy, 2 - Cloudy or overcast.

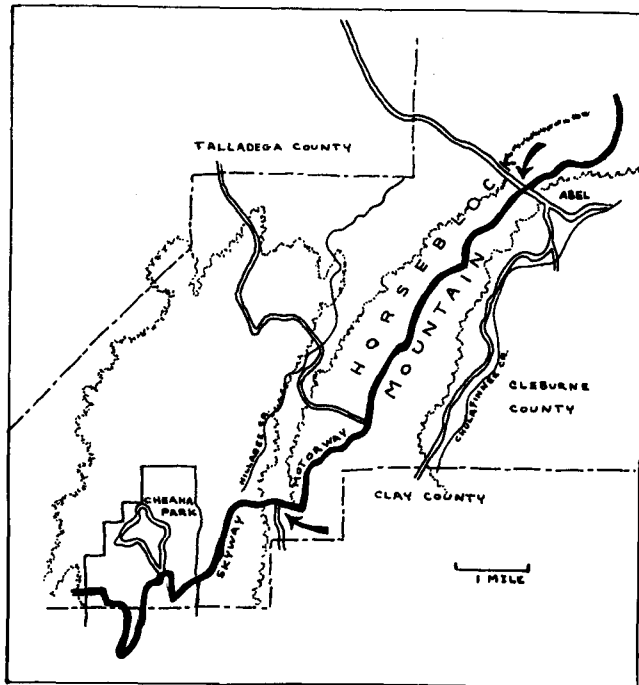


Figure 1. Location of part of the Skyway Motorway north of Cheaha State Park. Six miles of the parkway discussed in this are included between the arrows.

#### FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF COOTS IN MOUNTAIN REGION

The first positive breeding record of the American Coot in the Mountain Region of Alabama was recorded in late summer, 1972, at East Lake approximately four miles from downtown Birmingham. The nest, constructed of water plants, was located beyond the end of one of the fishing spits that extend into the lake and was first noted by this reporter on July 29 when one bird of a pair was found on the nest. The nest was photographed two days later, and one of the birds was then observed presenting a water plant to the other, who, while sitting on the nest, tucked the plant into it.

Young chicks, black with bright orange heads and bills, were first observed on August 12 swimming behind the two adults and being fed algae. It is thought the young were probably four to six days old at that time, although the hatching date is not known. The young were photographed on August 17 and 19, and, by the latter date, had doubled in size, developed downy fluff and retained orange only on the bills.

Around ten days later, when observed on August 31, the young were approximately half-grown, having acquired black bills and light gray throats and underparts. At this time they were not only being fed by the adults but also feeding themselves. Then, by September 15, approximately a month after having first been observed, they were almost the size of the parents and all gray in color, having changed their plumage from the black of the chicks to a gray shade. The beginning of the white tail patches was then noted, and the young were probably being weaned because they were giving "squeaking" calls without receiving any attention from the adults.

On October 1, the two young were still gray and larger than before, being only slightly smaller than the adults and with their heads becoming darker and bills lighter, much as shown in the picture by Arthur Singer in the field guide, Birds of North America. Two weeks later on October 14, they had apparently acquired full adult plumage and could not be distinguished from the wintering flock of coots, then numbering approximately 85, that had arrived at East Lake.

It is interesting that prior to observing the nest, only one adult bird had been noted on the lake when it was checked once in May and again in early July. This was the ninth consecutive year one or more coots have summered on East Lake but is the first time any nesting evidence has been noted. In addition to the coots, two Ring-necked Ducks and one male American Widgeon also summered on the lake, and a male Wood Duck in eclipse plumage was found there from the latter part of August until the middle of September.

For this account, we are indebted to Idalene F. and Thomas S. Sneed, who first spotted the young on August 12, to Helen H. Kittinger for establishing photographic evidence of the nest and young, and to other observers, including Russell Bailey, Jr., and his daughter Laura, John F. Harsh, Ruth Horsley and many others who came out to the lake just to see the young chicks.

Robert R. Reid, Jr., 2616 Mountain Brook Parkway, Birmingham 35223.