

THE SEASON, SPRING

March, April and May, 1977

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This is a happy season for the birder who welcomes back old friends who are easy to find, in bright colors and singing loudly. But this year some of this pleasure was dulled by some blank spaces on our lists, for some days afield and some counts revealed that some species were in real short supply, some abundant birds even were reduced to common or uncommon. The weather apparently was responsible for most of this - certainly it was severe enough! (See winter account above.) About March 7 the weather changed and we began to receive a lot of strong southerly winds so that March averaged over 4 degrees above the daily mean and April and May about 2 degrees. March and April had more than 2 inches above normal precipitation, but May was about normal. On the coast, there has been little measurable precipitation since late March, and at present (late June) it is close to drought conditions. Very few significant cold fronts have crossed the coast since early March.

The following species appear to be abnormally scarce and very likely took big losses this winter: Common Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, House and Carolina Wrens, Golden- and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Myrtle Warbler, Yellowthroat, Chipping and White-throated Sparrows away from feeders. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker and American Goldfinch may also be in this group. Most of the waterbirds appear to have been little affected by the severe cold, and the following landbirds have increased at least on the Birmingham Spring Counts: Red-shouldered Hawk, Mourning Dove, Great Crested Flycatcher, Barn Swallow, Brown Creeper, Veery, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and White-eyed Vireo. Note that only the first two and the creeper are common here in January.

On the coast, Fairly Chandler notes that "frontal systems ceased this year after the first week of April, and we saw few migrants on the coast." Lib Toenes reports that at Dauphin Island, "This is the worst late March and early April ever." Margaret Miller reports from there, "Banding and birding were slow again this year. However, I did get a few good species." Tuck Hayward elaborates that since the last of April, "birds have been scattered but more interesting." Mary Gaillard simplifies and consolidates it all, "a very disappointing migration." In Birmingham the arrival of some species appears to have been delayed in spite of the southerly winds and normal development of vegetation.

FLICKER: Our main concern is the Common Flicker which has dropped on the Birmingham Spring Counts from a 1966-1971 average of .675 bird per party hour to .242. (For an average 10-hour day, one party would see 6-3/4 birds, but now they see less than 2-1/2!) We feel that this champion eater of ants is probably getting a large dose of chlorine - Mirex is untra-persistent and contains far more chlorine than DDT, which is banned - and the weakened birds were in poor shape to survive the bitter cold. In any case, we are now counting flickers in lower numbers than ever before - verified on some early reported Breeding Bird Surveys - and perhaps Alabama may find itself in the same embarrassing position as Louisiana did with its Brown Pelicans two decades ago!

Noteworthy records appear below; abbreviations explained in winter season report in this issue.

White Pelican: June 1, 43 migrating easterly, Tuscaloosa (RKC); only spring rec between GC and TV.

Brown Pelican: May 12; Dauphin I., peak of only 36, 2 adults (LRT), indicates good reproduction but numbers do not compare with 1973 and 1975.

Blue-faced Booby: Apr. 9, ten (RWH); Apr. 15, many (RWH); June 5, 1 immature (CDD), all Dauphin; 7th consecutive year in coastal Alabama mostly Jan. & April.

Double-crested Cormorant: April 25, Decatur (DMB); Eufaula Ref., April 2, 6, since then a total of 15 daily, last seen May 19 (JBO).

Cattle Egret - Little Blue Heron: May 16, Gordo, a heronry containing 1500 birds, 5 Little Blues to each Cattle Egret, destroyed by local farmers with shotguns - State Conservation Dept. notified.

Glossy Ibis: Adults seen both sides of Bay in the vicinity of Cat I. since early March (LRT, TAI, others); 2 adults flying up Chattahoochee R. at Eufaula Ref. April 10 (JBO).

White-faced Ibis: June 4, Cat I., 6 adults (photo-PGJ, CDD); apparently both forms - species, subspecies, whatever - are breeding on the same island and perhaps this is the test that will tell us just what these forms are!

Mallard: April 26, 4 ducklings led by both parents, 1st brood of season, Eufaula Ref. (JBO).

Pintail: March 26, L. Purdy (HME), latest for Mtr; Apr. 15, Mobile (DMB, CDC, SG), latest for GC.

Canvasback: April 5, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), latest ICP.

Greater Scaup: Feb. 13, 12, L. Guntersville S.P. (CDC), inland max.

Lesser Scaup: April 5, 125 & April 23, 65, Eufaula Ref. (JBO).

Common Goldeneye: April 8, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), only spring rec ICP.

Oldsquaw: April 26, St. Andrew's Bay, male, (ALM, PFC), latest Alabama.

White-winged Scoter: Feb. 26, Decatur (DCH), latest inland Ala.

Surf Scoter: April 24, male and female, Gulf Shores (ALM), latest Alabama.

Ruddy Duck: May 28, female, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), may summer again.

Common Merganser: Mar. 28, 3, Decatur (DCH), latest for TV but we have April recs for MTR and GC.

Red-breasted Merganser: Apr. 19, 125 (JBO).

Swallow-tailed Kite: Mar. 12-Apr. 22, 7 recs of 13 birds on GC (MAG, mob).

Bald Eagle: Apr. 23, adult, Eufaula Ref. (JBO).

Eagle sp.: Mar. 16, two, Point Clear (PFC).

Osprey: Eufaula Ref., first, April 8, two; nine noted flying n. from ref. this spring, two remain - may breed? (JBO).

Peregrine: March 27, Blakely I., Mobile, flushed thousands of shorebirds and even White Pelicans (TAI, HNW); April 29, Wheeler Ref. (DMB, ALM, MMCD), latest TV; May 8, Dauphin I (REH), latest Alabama.

Sora: March 5, 12 & 15, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), earliest n. of winter range.

Piping Plover: May 8, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), 3rd inland spring Alabama.

American Golden Plover: March 15, Decatur, 275 birds (DMB, mob), state max.

Ruddy Turnstone: Decatur, May 14 (DMB) & May 31, 3 (DCH), 3rd & 4th inland spring recs.

Upland Sandpiper: reports of 7 recs of 43 birds are indeed encouraging; two May 28 at Eufaula Ref. (JBO) are latest for Alabama exc 3 summer recs.

Lesser Yellowlegs: March 5, 25, Decatur (DMB, CDC, SG) earliest n. of ICP.

Pectoral Sandpiper: March 12, Belle Mina, Limestone Co., (DMB, CDC), earliest rec TV.

White-rumped Sandpiper: April 26, two, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest inland Ala. exc TV.

Baird's Sandpiper: May 14, two, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), carefully identified, inland spring Alabama total now 4 recs of 12 birds.

Least Sandpiper: May 28, 23 birds, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), latest TV.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: March 5, 3, seen and heard, Decatur (DMB, CDC, SG), earliest inland Ala.

Western Sandpiper: March 5, Decatur (DMB, CDC, SG), earliest TV.
 Sanderling: May 14, 2, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), 1st spring ICP.
 Short-billed Dowitcher: March 15, 15, Decatur (DMB, ALM, HHK, HHF), earliest TV.
 Marbled Godwit: April 9, Dauphin I. (CDD, HME), earliest GC exc winter.
 Hudsonian Godwit: June 7, summer plumage, Cochrane Causeway, Mobile (CDD), 6th Ala. rec, latest of 4 spring recs GC.
 American Avocet: June 3, 14 & June 7, 3, Blakely I., Mobile (both CDD); second successive summer may lead to local breeding.
 Black-necked Stilt: birds first noted Blakely I., March 10 (TAI, MN) have produced young by early June (CDD).
 Northern Phalarope: April 29, Blakely I. (CDD, HME), 2nd spring rec Alabama.
 Glaucous Gull: April 13 (RWH) & May 7 (REH), both Dauphin, 4th year on GC.
 Franklin's Gull: April 24 & 25, adult in summer plumage, Decatur (TAI, GMI, DMB), 7th Ala. rec, 4th for TV, 1st in April, all recs are of adults.
 Laughing Gull: March 30, Wheeler Ref. (DMB, ALM), 8th TV rec, 1st in March; April 12 - May 17, 17 birds at Eufaula Ref. (JBO), helps to verify that species is a regular migrant in Chattahoochee Valley. It is not known to breed on the Great Lakes, although a few summer, so one might ask where the birds are going. We have two banding recoveries from the Atlantic coast. At Barnegat Bay, N.J., this summer young Laughing Gulls are being marked by Joanna Burger of Rutgers U. with 5-cm. orange or orange and green wing tags besides the usual federal aluminum leg bands. Look sharply at Alabama Laughing Gulls this summer and fall and you may be able to help to establish that the birds migrate overland from the Atlantic coast. Shorebirds are also being marked with colored tags. Please record all details such as color and position of tags and place, time and associates of bird to the Bird Banding Laboratory, USF&WS, Laurel, Md. 20811.
 Bonaparte's Gull: April 2, Gunter'sville, 50, nearly all black-headed (CDC, TAI, ALM); black-headed birds are rare on the coast and this seems to indicate that the development of the black head and the urge to migrate are concurrent.
 Forster's Tern: April 12, 2 & May 8, 1, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest inland spring rec Ala.; April 24, Decatur (TAI, GMI), earliest TV.
 Common Tern: April 12, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), 1st spring rec ICP.
 Gaspian Tern: April 1, 2; April 12, 2; May 8, 1; all Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest inland Ala.; April 25, 2, Decatur (DMB), ties earliest TV.
 Black Tern: April 16, 8, Gulf Shores (DMB, CDC, SG), earliest Ala., May 8, 2, Birmingham (JVP, RWL), 2nd spring rec Mtr.
 Chimney Swift: March 28, 6, Scottsboro (BGW); March 29, 6, Wheeler Ref (DMB, ALM), 1st & 2nd earliest TV.
 Gray Kingbird: Apr. 2, Dauphin (RWH), earliest Ala. by 9 days.
 Barn Swallow: March 13, Decatur (DMB), earliest TV, ties earliest inland.
 Cliff Swallow: March 22, 5, Decatur (DCH), earliest TV.
 House Wren: May 28, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), may indicate local breeding.
 Wood Thrush: Normal arrival in Birmingham is about March 25, earliest March 11 - this year the first reported was April 15 (HHK) and April 18 on Ruffner Mt. 100 were seen (JVP).
 Veery: March 28, Dauphin (REH), earliest Ala.; April 18, Birmingham (JVP), earliest Mtr.
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: March 19, 2, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), earliest TV.
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Scarcity of species illustrated by this contrast: May 1, 1976, 104 birds in 163 party hours (Birmingham Spring Count), April 30 - May 1, 1977, no birds in 30 party hours - a similar story repeated since January.
 Red-eyed Vireo: March 20, Fairhope (MN) & Spring Hill (MAG), first reported same date from opposite sides of Mobile Bay.
 Black-whiskered Vireo: April 6, Dauphin I., 1 banded (MEM), earliest of 11 Alabama recs.
 Warbling Vireo: April 8, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest ICP.

Swainson's Warbler: April 20, Scottsboro (BGW), earliest TV.
 Cape May Warbler: April 10, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), 2nd spring rec ICP.
 Black-throated Blue Warbler: Dauphin I., 11 banded late April and early May (MEM, REH); May 11, Birmingham Zoo (HME), latest spring Ala.
 Black-throated Green Warbler: March 19, Perry Mtn. (HHK, B.A.S.) a male, earliest ICP may indicate the farthest south breeding in Ala.; May 27, Decatur (DMB), latest spring rec away from breeding range.
 Yellow-throated Warbler: March 26, Wheeler Ref. (DMB), earliest TV.
 Palm Warbler: May 14, Wheeler Ref. (DMB, JMH, TAB), latest TV.
 Ovenbird: April 10, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), 1st spring rec ICP.
 Northern Waterthrush: April 12, Eufaula Ref. (JBO), earliest ICP.
 Connecticut Warbler: April 30, Dauphin I., banded (MEM), second consecutive year there, second April rec Ala.
 Yellowthroat: March 5, Wheeler Ref. (DMB, CDC, SG), earliest TV exc winter.
 Bobolink: April 14, 4 males, Ft. Morgan (DMB), ties earliest GC.
 Rusty Blackbird: April 27, Decatur, female (DMB), ties latest Ala.
 Brewer's Blackbird: March 26, 6, Belle Mina (DMB, CDC), latest TV.
 Yellow-headed Blackbird: March 24 (BVM) & April 1 (MN), both Belforest, e. of Daphne; of 12 Ala. recs this is 4th in spring.
 Boat-tailed Grackle: late February into June, 4 miles e. of Daphne, Baldwin Co., 20+ males and females, habitat, pecan orchards, open cultivated fields, cemetery, small pond with a big willow (A&MN, TAI, PFC, others), apparently the birds are breeding in a non-marine habitat for the first time in Alabama.
 Indigo Bunting: March 10, Ft. Morgan (TAI, MN), first noted; March 28, Dauphin (REH), next noted; April 24, Sipsey Forest, none in 9 hours!(TAI, GMI); no first noted reported in SOSO of B.A.S. (JVP); com. May 1 in n. Alabama.
 House Finch: March 16, female, Decatur (DMB), last date for 3rd state rec.

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