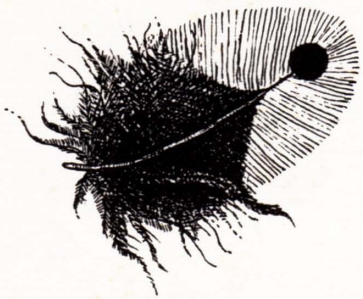

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THIRTY-FIVE-YEAR SUMMARY OF THE STATUS OF HERON COLONY SITES IN ALABAMA

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary D. Dusi

Since Howell's 1928 publication and the beginning of our work in 1952, little information has been obtained, or published, on wading bird colonies in Alabama. With the advent of *Alabama Birdlife* in 1953, articles by W. H. Allen, Jr. (1954), J. L. Dusi (1958, 1968, 1983), J. L. Dusi and R. D. Dusi (1967), J. Dindo and K. Marion (1986), J. E. Keeler (1956), R. W. Skinner (1963), C. W. Summerour (1964), and D. F. Werschkul (1977) have contributed to our knowledge of colony sites. In addition to those articles in *Alabama Birdlife*, publications by D. L. Bateman (1970), D. J. Drennen, et al. (1982), J. L. Dusi (1979), J. L. Dusi and R. D. Dusi (1967, 1970, 1978, 1987), J. L. Dusi et al. (1971), J. M. Martin (1973), C. A. McDonald (1971), R. S. L. McKitrick (1975), B. Ortego et al. (1979) and C. W. Summerour (1964) have provided heron colony knowledge.

METHODS

Finding new colony sites at first depended on help from friends like J. E. Keeler, who took us to some of the colony sites. Others were found by observing groups of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) flying in the same general direction, and following them to the colony site. We found that we could do this much better from light aircraft. Now we fly along several transects which take us to most of the possible sites in the Coastal Plain. The number of sites in north Alabama were so few that we drove to them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In our studies from 1952 to 1987, we have located about 60 colony sites (see Figure 1, p. 7). In addition, the number of Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodius*) nesting sites with one to several nests was found to be too great to specifically designate and it was found that most swamps in the Coastal Plain have at least one Great Blue Heron nest.

For analysis, the colony sites were placed in seven geographically related groups: the Tuskegee, Opp-Florala, Pansey, Fort Gaines-Eufaula, Montgomery, Faunsdale-Uniontown, and Mobile groups.

The TUSKEGEE GROUP consists of sites in and around Tuskegee, Macon and Lee counties.

The **Hog Wallow Ponds** site was located in shrubs in the upper end of two ponds known as the Hog Wallow Ponds, situated about 10 km south of Tuskegee. It was a pure Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) colony that existed from 1952 until a group of "sportsmen", who fished in the pond, shot them in 1958. Banding data obtained from this colony are referred to in Dusi (1958).

The **Marvyn** colony site was located 1 km south of Marvyn, Lee Co. It was in an old impoundment that was overgrown with willows (*Salix nigra*). It was a Little Blue Heron colony and was there during 1958 and 1959.

The **Tuskegee Holiday Inn** colony site was adjacent to the Holiday Inn (now Tuskegee Inn) in eastern Tuskegee, adjacent to I-85 and Ala. 81. This was a mixed colony of Little Blue Herons and Cattle Egrets. The colony site was a grove of pine trees. The colony grew and remained at that site until the spring of 1977. The colony was gone for one year but returned in 1978, after which the site was abandoned.

The **Motley Road** site was located on the northwest side of Tuskegee about 1 km southwest of the **Tuskegee Holiday Inn** site. It was a wooded upland site and was occupied only in 1977.

The **Colbert Road** colony site was located in a wooded area between two streets with houses in the middle of Tuskegee. The colony occupied the site in 1979. On 12 July 1979, the Tuskegee Police shot 2,163 Cattle Egrets, 2 Little Blue Herons and 4 White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) in an attempt to cause the colony to leave the site (Dusi, 1979). The egrets returned in 1980 but were harassed and left the site.

The **Seigrist** site was located about 16 km southwest of Tuskegee and 2 km west of Hardaway. It was a swampy pond with low vegetation in the center. The Cattle Egret colony occupied it in 1980.

The **Judkins** site was located about 1 km west of the **Colbert Road** site and was an upland wooded site. The egrets attempted to nest there in 1981 but were harassed and caused to leave. Since the there has been no heron colony in the Tuskegee Group area.

The **Hardaway** colony site is located in a large swamp south of Hardaway. It has been a Great Blue Heron colony site since 1968. It was also the site of an attempted Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) nesting in 1968 (Dusi and Dusi, 1968).

The **Union Springs** colony site was located in the trees in a small pond, 2 km northwest of Union Springs, Bullock Co. It was present only in 1984. The pond level was lowered to repair the dam in 1985 and the birds abandoned the site.

The OPP-FLORALA GROUP is in the Yellow River drainage in Covington Co., Alabama, and Walton Co., Florida.

The **Opp** colony site was in a small sinkhole-tupelo swamp surrounded by several kilometers of pine forests. It was about 16 km south of Opp, Covington Co. The colony contained Little Blue Herons and White Ibises until 1963, when C. W. Summerour found the first Cattle Egret nest for Alabama (Dusi and Dusi, 1963). The site was occupied until 1966.

The **Florala Northwest** colonies were at several sites about 10 km northwest of Florala, all of which were swamps. Colonies were present in 1964 and 1965, then from 1978 to 1981, and again in 1984 and 1986.

The **Florala South** colony site was a small sinkhole just south of Florala in Highway 331 and was occupied in 1970 and 1971 by a Cattle Egret colony.

The **Florala East** site is in a small swamp. The first colony was there in 1979. It was seen again 1985, 1986 and 1987.

The **Onycha** site was at a small pond near Onycha, south of Opp. It had a colony in 1985, but not since.

The Pansey Group is found along the lower Chattahoochee River valley and extends west to Geneva Co.

The **Pansey** colony site is located just south of the community of Pansey, southeast of Dothan on Highway 84, in Houston Co. It is a tupelo swamp type and was an active composite colony from 1963 through 1969. Little Blue Heron, Cattle Egret, Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*), White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), and one Scarlet Ibis (*E. ruber*) and Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*) were present. A number of research studies were done in this colony.

The **Bonfire Club** colony site was a swamp 1 km east of the Pansey site. It was a small mixed colony from 1970 through 1974.

The **Malone** colony site was 20 km southwest of Pansey and 5 km south of Cottonwood, Houston Co. It was a cypress-tupelo swamp with Little Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets and White Ibises. It was present in 1969.

The **Ashford** colony site was a pond adjacent to the Ashford High School, on Highway 84, 12 km southeast of Dothan. It was first seen in 1976 and abandoned in 1983. It was mostly Cattle Egrets.

The **Slocomb** colony site was in a swamp 1 km south of Slocomb, Geneva Co. It had a large colony when we first found it in 1984 but decreased to only a few birds in 1987, when drought lowered the swamp water level.

The **Cottonwood** colony site had a small Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax violaceus*) colony located on Spring Creek, 4 km

southeast of Cottonwood, Houston Co. It was known to us from 1970 to 1984 (Drennen et al., 1982).

The FORT GAINES-EUFAULA Group is closely associated with the Chattahoochee River, north of the Pansey Group.

The **Fort Gaines (10 km N.)** colony site was in Georgia, about 400 m east of the Chattahoochee River and 10 km north of Ft. Gaines, Clay Co. It was a medium-sized mixed species colony. Wood Storks and Great Blue Herons often roosted there in the summer. We knew it from 1967 to 1982, when it was abandoned. McDonald (1971) did her doctoral research here.

The **Fort Gaines South** colony site was an overflow swamp, adjacent to the Chattahoochee River and Ft. Gaines. It started in 1983 and continues to be active. It also appears to be an important winter roosting site for Great Egrets.

The Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge has several associated colony sites. The **Bradley Unit** colony site had a small colony in the willows on the banks of a drainage ditch. It started in 1979 and was active for two years. The **Houston Unit** colony site was in a group of willows in a slough. It started in 1981 and was active until 1985. The **Molnar Unit** colony site is a beaver swamp with button bush-tupelo-pine. It started in 1985 and was a large, mixed-species colony. In 1987 and 1988 it had mostly Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets nesting there, since the water level became much lower.

The **Seale** colony site is a small beaver swamp just west of Seale, Russell Co. We first saw it in 1986 and it is currently active as a small mixed colony.

The **Clayton** colony site was a small pond 1 km north of Clayton, Barbour Co. In 1985 it was mostly Cattle Egrets and it continued through 1986.

The Montgomery Group is mostly associated with the vicinity of Montgomery, Alabama.

The **Pinedale** colony site was located in the Pinedale Community in southeastern Montgomery. It was an upland colony in pine and oak trees adjacent to several houses. It was a Little Blue Heron-Cattle Egret colony from 1964 to 1970. Tree cutting caused it to be abandoned.

The **Pintlala** colony site was a pine grove just west of Pintlala. A Cattle Egret-Little Blue Heron colony occupied it from 1970 to 1972.

The **Millbrook** colony site was an upland mixed forest at the edge of a gravel pit. It had an established colony of mixed species from 1973 until 1983.

The **U.S. 31 North**, or **Cooter's Pond** colony site, was established in 1984. It is about 2 km southwest of Millbrook. It has an upland colony

on an island and has about the same composition and size as the **Millbrook** colony had. It is currently functional.

The **Normandale** colony site was located in the subdivision of Normandale and the nests of about 30 Black-crowned Night-Herons *(Nycticorax nycticorax)* were placed in large oak and pine trees dispersed through the neighborhood. The colony has occupied this site from at least 1983 to 1986. The present status is uncertain since some of the residents of the neighborhood objected to the birds' presence.

North of Montgomery, about 40 km, is a small town named Mountain Creek, Chilton Co. The **Mountain Creek** colony site was on its eastern edge on a small 0.5 ha pond. The colony was a typical (before the advent of the Cattle Egret) Little Blue Heron group of about 30 pairs. We knew of it from 1961 until 1967, when the site was abandoned.

The **McLemore** colony site was located about 8 km east of Montgomery in a small swamp on the McLemore Plantation. It was colonized by Cattle Egrets and Little Blue Herons just in 1972.

The FAUNSDALE-UNIONTOWN GROUP of sites has been situated around Uniontown, Perry Co., and Faunsdale, Hale Co.

The **Faunsdale** colony site was in a grove of trees just west of Faunsdale and south of U.S. 80. We saw it first in 1959 as a Little Blue Heron-Great Egret colony. The following year the trees were cut and the colony moved to a site about 5 km north of Faunsdale (**Faunsdale North colony site**) and increased with the addition of the Cattle Egret and White Ibises until 1971.

The **Uniontown South** colony appeared in 1964, possibly as part of the Faunsdale Colony. The site was in a grove of cedar and pine, about 3 km south of Uniontown, but in Marengo Co. It was an active colony until 1970 and again from 1976 - 1978. In 1983 a colony again appeared but in a site just across the Perry Co. line. They stayed until 1986.

The **Uniontown Northwest** colony site is situated about 8 km northwest of Uniontown. Its colony appeared in 1971 and it developed into a very large mixed colony, mostly Cattle Egrets. It was active through 1973. In 1978 it was again active until 1980. In 1980 the colony moved about 400 m southwest to a pine grove and was active there until 1982.

The **Faunsdale Northwest** colony site is located about 5 km northwest of Faunsdale in a large cedar-pine grove. The colony occupied this area in 1986 and it is still being used in 1988. It is a very large mixed-species colony.

Several small colonies have appeared north of Camden, in Dallas County. One, the **Camden** colony site, was on Hammermill Paper Company land, on a small swampy creek. It was active from 1971 to 1974.

LOCATION OF HERON COLONY SITES AND THEIR STATUS *

I. TUSKEGEE GROUP SITES
1. Tuskegee Holiday Inn (I)
Motley Road (I)
Colbert Road (I)
Judkins (I)
2. Hardaway (A)
Seigrist (I)
3. Hog Wallow Ponds (I)
4. Marvyn (I)
5. Union Springs (I)

II. OPP-FLORALA GROUP SITES
6. Opp (I)
7. Florala East (A)
8. Florala South (I)
9. Florala Northwest (I)
10. Onycha (I)

III. PANSEY GROUP SITES
11. Pansey (I)
Bonfire Club (I)
12. Ashford (I)
13. Slocomb (A)
14. Malone (I)
15. Cottonwood (I)

IV. FORT GAINES-EUFAULA GROUP SITES
16. Ft. Gaines South (A)
17. Ft. Gaines North (I)
18. Eufaula NWR-Bradley Unit (I)
19. Eufaula NWR-Houston and Molnar Units (I)
20. Clayton (I)
21. Seale (A)

V. MONTGOMERY GROUP SITES
22. Pinedale (I)
Normandale (A)
Pintlala (I)
Pintlala GBH (A)
McLemore (I)
23. Millbrook (I)
U.S. 31 North, or
Cooter's Pond (A)
24. Mountain Creek (I)

VI. FAUNSDALE-UNIONTOWN GROUP SITE
25. Faunsdale (I)
Faunsdale North (I)
Faunsdale Northwest(A)
26. Uniontown South (I)
Uniontown Northwest(I)
35. Camden (I)
Berlin (I)

VII. MOBILE GROUP SITES
27. Choctaw NWR (A)
28. Jackson (A)
29. Southfield Lake (I)
30. Spanish Fort (A)
31. Grand Bay (I)
St. Elmo (I)
32. Cat Island (A)

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS GROUP SITES
33. Decatur Swan Creek (I)
34. Bellefonte (A)

* (I) Inactive
(A) Active

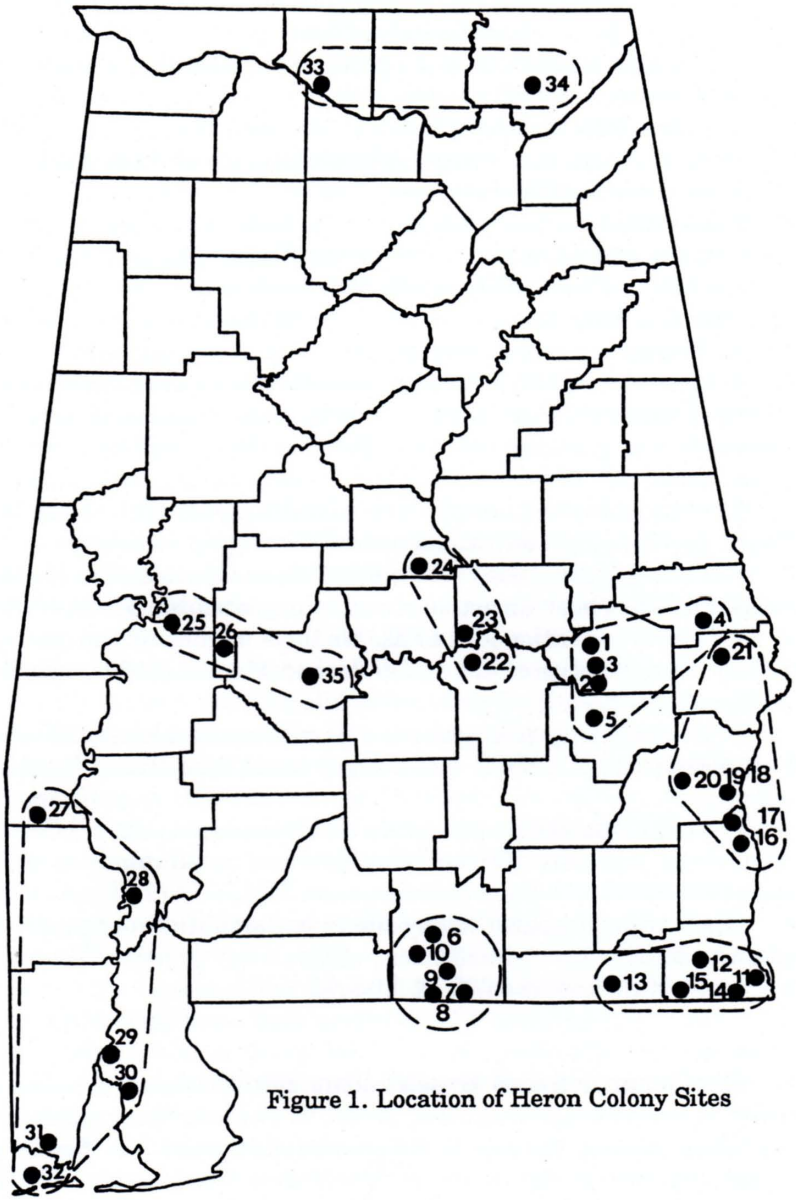

Figure 1. Location of Heron Colony Sites

Another, the **Berlin** colony site, was on a small creek about 1 km west of the community of Berlin, in 1973. Other transitory colonies have appeared nearby for short periods of time.

The MOBILE GROUP is the group of colonies in the southwestern part of the state.

The **Choctaw Refuge** colony site was a small swamp on the refuge, located in Choctaw Co., along the Tombigbee River. This site has had a colony for a number of years, from 1966 to the present.

The **Jackson** colony sites have been located adjacent to and sometimes in the city of Jackson, Clarke Co. The Tombigbee River level at nesting has had an important effect on the exact location of the colony. We visited it from the ground in 1974, when it was sited on Bassett Creek. The colony was mixed species.

In the Mobile Delta an island in Southfield Lake (**Southfield Lake site**) had the first White Ibis colony to be reported for Alabama (Keeler, 1956). We saw a colony there in 1969 also. Flooding of the river often covers the site.

The **Spanish Fort** colony site is in the Boggy Branch of Bay Minette Creek. In 1986 and 1987 it had a small Cattle Egret colony.

The **Cat Island** colony site is situated on Cat Island in Mississippi Sound. This has been an active mixed colony site from before 1965 when M. W. Gaillard mentioned it to us. We have monitored the colony from the air for a number of years. Dindo and Marion (1986) reported the nesting of the Reddish Egret on Cat Island.

The **Grand Bay** colony site is a small swamp 4 km south of Grand Bay, Mobile Co. In 1986 it was a small Little Blue Heron-Cattle Egret colony.

The **St. Elmo** colony site was a small swamp on the southern edge of St. Elmo, just east of Grand Bay. It was a small colony in 1986 and reportedly had been there for five years.

The **Gaillard Island** colony site is on the southern edge of a dredge island in Mobile Bay. A small colony of Cattle Egrets nested there in 1987 (personal communication, J. M. Myers).

Several MISCELLANEOUS colony sites were present in northern Alabama.

The **Decatur Swan Creek** colony site was located on the Swan Creek Game Management Area on the Tennessee River north of Decatur, Limestone Co. It was a swampy wooded area that was flooded in the winter but dry in the summer. The colony was composed of Black-crowned Night-Herons, Little Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets, and Great Egrets. We banded herons there from 1963 until 1966, when it was abandoned.

The **Bellefonte** colony site is at the peninsula between the mouths of Town Creek and Mud Creek on the Bellefonte Plant site. Great Blue Herons have occupied this site for a long period of time. Current status is contained in T.V.A. heron status reports by Burline P. Pullin.

These baseline data indicate that heron colony sites have not been static, once occupied, but have been changed frequently and will probably continue to do so as long as the number of suitable colony sites remains available.

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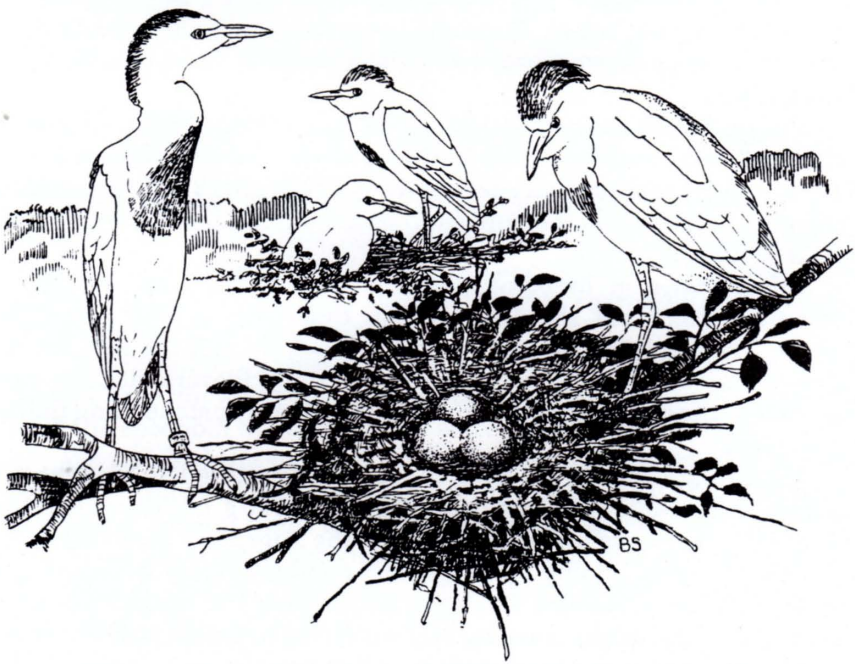

PIPING PLOVER *(CHARADRIUS MELODUS)* RESEARCH ON THE GULF COAST OF ALABAMA

Guy A. Baldassarre

INTRODUCTION

The Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is a small shorebird found only in North America, breeding locally in suitable habitat throughout its range. The two major breeding populations on the continent occur along the east coast from Virginia to Newfoundland and in the prairies of Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Minnesota northward into the prairie provinces of Canada; a very small population occurs locally along the shores of the Great Lakes. The major winter areas are along the Atlantic Coast from Virginia southward and along the Gulf Coast (see Haig and Oring 1985).

Piping Plovers resemble a small Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), with both sexes similar in size and appearance. Adults average about 55 g in weight and have an average wing length of 117 mm. The back is pale gray-brown while the forehead, cheeks, throat, and underparts are white (Johnsgard 1981).

Adult males in breeding plumage have a dark bar across the forecrown and black shoulder patches that often extend across the breast. The bill is yellow-orange with a black tip and the legs are the same orange color as the bill. In winter, Piping Plovers lack the dark forecrown, the breastband is reduced to lateral gray patches, and the bill is all black.

Unregulated hunting during the Market Hunting Era brought this species to the verge of extinction by the early 1900's, but the population eventually recovered under protection of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. However, Piping Plovers began another serious decline in the 1940's, this time because extensive development of beachfront areas destroyed or disturbed breeding and wintering habitats. Indeed, recent surveys indicate fewer than 2000 breeding pairs remain in the United States and Canada (see Sidle 1984). Accordingly, in January 1986 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the Piping Plover as endangered along the Great Lakes and threatened throughout its remaining

range.

Despite this precarious status, however, there are few detailed studies of Piping Plovers and most research addresses breeding ecology (Wilcox 1959, Cairns 1982, Haig and Oring 1988). Studies during winter are few, yet Piping Plovers may spend 9 months of the year on wintering sites. This lack of winter data is significant because substantial annual mortality in migrating shorebirds occurs on sites away from their breeding grounds. Thus, knowledge of Piping Plover ecology during winter is essential before effective plans to increase Piping Plover populations can be formulated and then implemented.

Such data can be collected along the barrier beaches of coastal Alabama because this area is among the important wintering sites for Piping Plovers in North America. For example, Christmas Bird Counts indicate that coastal Alabama has always supported a winter population of Piping Plovers; winter surveys as recently as 1985 have tallied over 100 individuals.

Winter studies of Piping Plovers in Alabama were initiated during the fall/winter of 1984-85 and were completed in the winter of 1987. The objectives of these studies were to determine: (1) activity patterns of Piping Plovers during winter; (2) habitat use patterns; and (3) the return rate of wintering Piping Plovers to coastal Alabama.

STUDY AREA

The 3 major areas used by Piping Plovers in coastal Alabama are: (1) a 3-km-long beach and mudflat area located on the north side of Dauphin Island and known locally as St. Stevens Point; (2) the west end of Little Dauphin Island; and (3) Sand Island (Fig. 2). The north side of the west end of Dauphin Island was a key feeding site for Piping Plovers prior to September 1985 when Hurricane Elena destroyed this area. However, this site should recover in future years and thus should still be considered a key area for Piping Plovers in coastal Alabama.

METHODS

Activity patterns of Piping Plovers were determined from September through April 1984-85 and October through April 1985-86 by observing individual birds for 5-15 minutes each and recording their behavior at 15-second intervals (see Johnson 1987). Piping Plovers also were banded and color-marked to provide information on local movements and fidelity to the area in subsequent winters.

Figure 2. Location of Study Sites on Dauphin Island and Adjacent Areas in Coastal Alabama

In January 1986, a total of 14 Piping Plovers was captures and fitted with miniature (2.5 g) back-mounted radio transmitters. These birds were then tracked daily from 28 January to 1 March to determine patterns of habitat use among the study areas (see Zivojnovich 1987).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Activity patterns of Piping Plovers on the Alabama coast were determined by observing individual birds for a total of 192 hours. Feeding was the dominant behavior, averaging 76% of activity throughout winter; feeding activity was highest (90%) during December. Resting was the other major winter activity.

One reason why Piping Plovers may spend such a high amount of time feeding is that they are "sight predators." This means that they pick prey items visible on the surface of mudflats rather than probe below the surface as do many other shorebirds. Thus, their feeding opportunities are restricted to daylight hours, which causes a high amount of feeding activity during that time as the plovers seek to obtain necessary energy to survive winter. It thus becomes important to protect birds from disturbance during the daylight hours because feeding sites appear to be limited in coastal Alabama, as was indicated by patterns of habitat use.

The habitat use data were obtained from 594 radio locations of 14 Piping Plovers that were monitored from January 28 to March 1, 1987. Of these locations, 81% were from Little Dauphin Island, 10% were from Dauphin Island, and 3% were from Sand Island.

These locations appeared to be primarily a response to availability of foraging sites. For example, from 28 January through 1 February, good foraging conditions (mudflats) occurred on Dauphin and Little Dauphin Islands and 12 of 14 radio-marked plovers were located at these sites. Conversely, as foraging habitat conditions deteriorated due to rising tides, only 2 plovers were located on these sites by 4 February. Habitat conditions then improved from 7 to 12 February and 13 of 14 plovers returned to study sites on Dauphin and Little Dauphin Islands. This pattern of use indicates that Piping Plovers concentrate at the few sites where feeding conditions can become optimal, but otherwise disperse within Mobile Bay.

Overall, the preponderance of radio-locations on Little Dauphin Island (81%) would indicate that this area is the primary feeding site of Piping Plovers using Mobile Bay at this time. Indeed, during optimal mudflat conditions on Little Dauphin Island, as many as 50 Piping Plovers were observed using the area.

It is important to protect prime feeding sites because Piping Plovers apparently return to the same wintering area year after year. For example, of 19 Piping Plovers color-banded during the 1984-85 individuals were still present in early April. However, resightings of color-marked Piping Plovers indicated that most individuals did not leave the study areas from late November to late January, thus monitoring of winter populations may best be accomplished by surveying populations during this time period.

Studies of Piping Plovers are continuing on both breeding and wintering sites in order to obtain the data that will be necessary to implement practices designed to increase populations. The studies in coastal Alabama not only provide information for use in the state, but can be applied in other Piping Plover wintering areas. Of obvious importance will be to protect key feeding areas (e.g., Little Dauphin Island) not only from habitat destruction but from human disturbance as well. If this can be done in Alabama, it will not only insure that habitat conditions exist for wintering Piping Plovers but will also provide suitable habitats for a variety of other coastal birds (Baldassarre 1986).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Betty Corsak

THE ALABAMA COAST: A WINTER REFUGE FOR PIPING PLOVERS *(CHARADRIUS MELODUS)*

Janice Nicholls

INTRODUCTION

The Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) has achieved a celebrity status due to an intense conservation effort following its designation as a threatened/endangered species in Jan. 1986 (U.S.F.W.S. 1986). A proliferation of research has detailed aspects of the species' breeding biology and status, yet little attention has been directed towards understanding its winter ecology and distribution. The Piping Plover recovery plans (i.e., representing the Atlantic and Great Lakes/Great Plains breeding populations) have stressed the need to determine the critical wintering areas so that habitat management and protection measures can be considered. Recently, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in conjunction with the Auburn University Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit completed an extensive survey of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts to locate the major wintering areas of the Piping Plover. Alabama was identified as an important component in the species' winter range.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fifty-two plovers were observed on the Alabama coast during the Gulf Coast survey conducted from 4 December 1987 - 23 March 1988. This represents approximately 3.4% of the Gulf Coast survey estimate and 1.2% of the total breeding population (U.S.F.W.S. 1988). Most birds (50) were sighted on Little Dauphin Island which is part of the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge; the remaining plovers were located on the Fort Morgan peninsula (1) and Dauphin Island (1). Comparing the results from both the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, Alabama had the third highest number of plovers per km surveyed (1.2) following Louisiana and Texas (2.0 and 1.6, respectively). Similarly, the state had the third highest number of plovers per km coastline (0.61) behind Texas and Georgia (1.4 and 0.66, respectively).

All Piping Plover sites identified during these surveys were ranked on a 1-5 scale to compare their relative importance. The set of criteria

used in the rating scheme included: 1) the number of plovers observed on the survey, 2) habitat quality (i.e., presence of foraging and roosting sites), 3) historical reports available and 4) disturbance factors (i.e., human and ORV traffic). Little Dauphin Island qualified as an excellent site (ranked 1), while Ft. Morgan and Dauphin Island were ranked lower (both ranked 4).

Although this survey recognizes Little Dauphin Island as the most important site for Piping Plovers within the Mobile Bay coastal complex, the adjacent barrier beaches are considered to be essential supporting habitat. Research on the activity budgets and local movement patterns of wintering plover populations in coastal Alabama suggests that the birds utilize different microhabitats depending on the weather, tide and time of day (Johnson and Baldassarre 1988, Zivojnovich and Baldassarre 1987). Thus, the expansive mudflats on Little Dauphin may serve as the primary foraging site when conditions are suitable, while nearby beaches (i.e., Sand Island, Dauphin Island) may be roosting or alternate feeding areas. Possibly, this diversity of microhabitats in close juxtaposition explains the relatively large number of plovers in Mobile Bay. Additional research on the specific habitat requirements and site fidelity of the Piping Plover during the winter period may lend credence to this observation.

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FIRST RECORD FOR THE CAVE SWALLOW (*PETROCHELIDON FULVA*)* IN ALABAMA AND SUMMARY OF SUBSEQUENT RECORDS

D. Mark Brown

On 22 April 1984, while birding Fort Morgan at the tip of the Morgan Peninsula, I discovered a swallow feeding in a mixed flock of swifts and swallows in the trench surrounding the historical fort. Closer inspection of what I assumed to be a Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) revealed a light buffy unmarked throat and a dark cinnamon forehead. The bird, in fact, was a Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*), the first ever discovered in Alabama. After studying the bird for several minutes, I left it to find Dwight Cooley, with whom I was birding that day, but found that he was temporarily in another part of the park. After locating him, we returned to the trench approximately thirty minutes later and had no problem relocating the swallow.

We studied the bird for the next 2 hours. The vertical distance from the floor of the trench to the top of the walls surrounding the trench is approximately 17 meters (50 feet). With Cooley positioned against the north wall on the floor of the trench, and I atop the wall on the opposite side, we had excellent views of the bird from every angle. The trench was rather wet this day and there was a good supply of flying insects on which the flock was feeding. The flock composition was approximately 65 Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), 40 Northern Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelqidopteryx serripennis*), 40 Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*),
20 Purple Martins (*Progne subis*), and 3 Bank Swallows (*Riparia riparia*). There were no Cliff Swallows present.

We were able to again verify all identifying characteristics and had excellent comparative views with all other species present. The forehead of the bird was a dark chestnut sharply bordered by a dark blue-black

*The Cliff Swallow and Cave Swallow are sometimes placed in the genus *Hirundo* (*A.O.U. Checklist of North American Birds*, 1983, 6th ed., p. 498)

crown. The ear coverts, chin, and throat were light buffy-orange and lacked any dark feathering. The buffy-orange throat faded into a very light gray breast and underparts which approached white over the bird's nape, giving it a somewhat collared look. The collar washed into a dark blue-gray back, which was marked with fine streaks of dirty white. The light peach-colored rump was sharply demarcated from the back and was very conspicuous as the bird maneuvered up and down the trench. The retrices, primaries, and primary coverts were slate-gray with the secondaries and their coverts having a slightly more bluish tint. The tail shape was square with a very slight notched appearance.

The bird fed actively for the duration of our study, often flying by us as close as 2 meters (5 feet). Several times, as the bird would ascend from the trench in pursuit of an insect, it would stall in mid-air providing excellent head-on views of the crown, forehead, lores, ear coverts, chin and throat simultaneously.

After 2 hours of extensive observation, we went to the nearest telephone to alert area birders in Mobile and Pensacola of this rare bird's presence. The bird, however, was not subsequently reported and was probably present only the one day we observed it.

Since our initial observation, there have been at least 4 more reports of this species from Alabama, all during April of 1987. On 14 April 1987 one bird was observed, again at Fort Morgan, by Robert Duncan and Bill Brown. On that same day, Greg Jackson observed one at the Dauphin Island Shell Mounds. The forth record came on 22 April 1987 when John Fulton and Jerome Carroll discovered a dead Cave Swallow at the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge headquarters building on the Morgan Peninsula, thus providing the first tangible proof of this species' occurrence in the state. The specimen was sent to the National Museum of Natural History and was identified as belonging to the race *fulva* of the West Indies. The fifth record was of a bird observed again on Dauphin Island on 25 and 26 April 1987, by Paul Franklin, Bob Sargent, and Tom Imhof.

Recent literature indicates that the Cave Swallow is expanding its range in the United States and that closer scrutiny might turn up more records along the Alabama coast. Those birding the better vagrant traps of Alabama, such as Fort Morgan and Dauphin Island, should be alert to the possible occurrence of this tropical swallow. *D. Mark Brown, 5414 Beverly Hill No. 51, Houston, Texas 77056.*

SPECIMEN OF CUBAN CAVE SWALLOW (*PETROCHELIDON FULVA FULVA*) FOUND ON BON SECOUR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Erica B. Bass

At 9 a.m. on 29 April 1987, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge Manager Jerome Carroll found the carcass of a Cuban Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva fulva*) near the refuge headquarters air conditioning unit. The headquarters is located 6.2 miles west on Ft. Morgan Rd., in Gulf Shores, AL. The Cave Swallow looks similar to the Cliff Swallow except for the deep chestnut forehead (the Cliff Swallow has a whitish forehead) and the evenly buff-colored throat (the Cliff Swallow has a dark russet throat sharply separated from a light breast). Realizing the uniqueness of his find, Mr. Carroll packed the swallow in dry ice and sent it to The Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., for species confirmation.

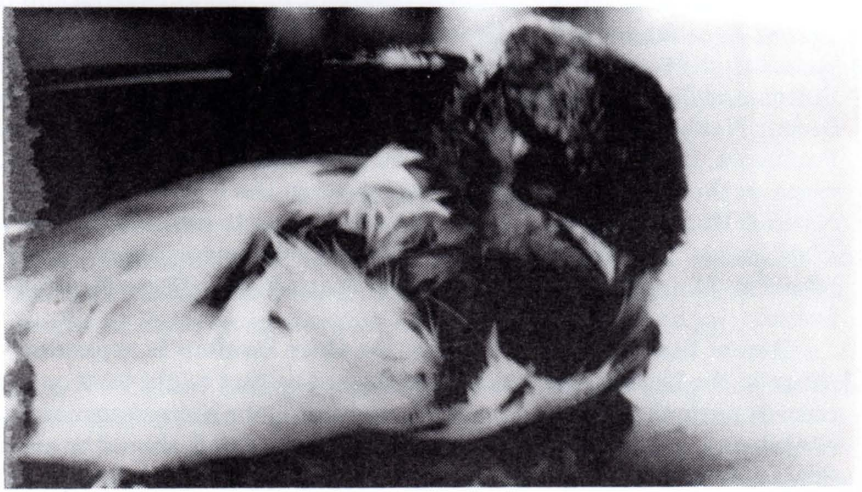

Figure 1. This specimen found near the headquarters building on Bon Secour NWF was identified as *Petrochelidon fulva fulva* by James Dean of the Smithsonian Institution. The specimen confirms the Cave Swallow as a new species for Alabama.

The Smithsonian's avian expert, James Dean, wrote back confirming the specimen as *Petrochelidon fulva fulva* based on the darkish coloration of the chestnut head and rump patch along with the length of the tail. The specimen was retained by the Smithsonian as a skeletal study.

This specimen and one collected in 1986 by Roger Tory Peterson on an island off the coast of the Mississippi may be the only ones collected from Alabama and Mississippi. These specimens support Cave Swallow sightings reported on the Alabama coast during April 1987 by seven birders in the area. The geographic range for the Cave Swallow is normally limited to Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and the Greater Antilles. It nests in limestone caves and is an occasional visitor to the Dry Tortugas and south Florida. *Erica B. Bass, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 1650, Gulf Shores, AL 36542.*

Editor's note: The Bon Secour specimen classified by James Dean of the Smithsonian Division of Birds was described in a letter to John Carroll as follows:

"I spent some time this morning along with one of my co-workers examining the specimen. Based on a comparison with specimens in our collection and literature references we believe the specimen to be of the nominate race *Petrochelidon fulva fulva*. The coloration of the chestnut head and rump patches match those of the *fulva* subspecies, and are much darker than the *pallidus* race of southwest Texas and Mexico. The length of the tail also fits nicely into the range of measurements published in several references. Our uncertainty about the subspecific identity arises from the wing measurement and the coloration of the abdomen. The wing length of the specimen you sent does not fit distinctly into one or the other of the subspecies. There is an overlap in the range of measurements for wing length of the two subspecies. It is in this range that the wing length of your specimen falls (though it is closer to the mean measurement for *fulva*).

"As for the abdominal coloration, most of our specimens have less white and more rufous chestnut color on the sides of the abdomen than the specimen you sent. This observation is really not very significant as it probably reflects the small number of birds collected in late April that were available for comparison.

"The geographic range for *Petrochelidon fulva fulva* as reported in most references is Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and the Greater Antilles. It is reported as an occasional to casual visitor to the Dry Tortugas and south Florida. There are apparently two records of the subspecies from Nova Scotia and a few unconfirmed accounts of its sighting in northwest Florida." *James Dean, Collection Management Staff, Division of Birds, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C. 20560*

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD *(XANTHOCEPHALUS XANTHOCEPHALUS)* OBSERVED NEAR ANNISTON.

Rene Simmons Roper

On 30 August 1988 I observed and photographed an immature male Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) feeding with a flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) outside my window on our farm in Choccolocco Valley near Anniston. Dr. Bill Summerour also observed this bird on 1 September and again with three other AOS members and myself on 4 September. The bird was last seen on 6 September having stayed around for at least 6 days. Its disappearance coincided with attacks by a Sharp-shinned Hawk *(Accipiter striatus)* which frightened the birds and presumably broke up their feeding routine. The Yellow-headed Blackbird is occasional in fall in Alabama and this sighting represented the only record for the Mountain Region. *Renee Roper, Rt. 5, Box 652 D, Anniston, Alabama 36201.*

SECOND RECORD FOR THE SULPHUR-BELLIED FLYCATCHER (*MYIODYNASTES LUTEIVENTRIS*) IN ALABAMA

John and Harriett Findlay

Alabama's second sighting for the Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher *(Myiodynastes luteiventris)* was recorded by John and Harriett Findlay on 27 September 1988 at Fort Morgan. It was first seen in the scattered pines around the picnic area just west of the ferry landing and parking lot, and was photographed in good light. Other birders from Alabama and adjacent states saw it during the 7 day period that the bird remained in the vicinity of the Fort Morgan grounds. It was last seen by the Findlays and others on 3 October.

In a 1984 article published in *American Birds* (Vol. 38, No. 2), Alabama's first state record for the Sulphur-bellied flycatcher was

described as follows: "Perhaps the bird of the season was a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher netted, banded and photographed at Dauphin Island, Sept. 6, 1983 (Sybil Hanks, et al.). The excellent color photographs (page 172) of the bird in the hand rule out other *Myiodynastes* flycatchers. The first record for Alabama supplements the single records from Mississippi and Louisiana."

The normal range of the Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher is S.E. Arizona to Costa Rica. It winters in South America. Could hurricane "Gilbert" a week earlier in September have influenced the off-course migration of this Flycatcher? The brunt of the hurricane made landfall in Mexico at the Texas border, but its heavy winds and rains affected all states bordering the Gulf of Mexico. *John and Harriett Wright Findlay, 2749 Millbrook Rd., Birmingham, AL 35243.*

ROSEATE SPOONBILL *(AJAIA AJAJA)* SIGHTED ON EUFAULA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary D. Dusi

An immature Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*) was present on the Bradley Unit, Stewart Co., GA, on 13 August 1988. It was feeding in a slough with a group of Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*), Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*) and immature White Ibises (*Eudocimus albus*).

The spoonbill appeared at ease as it fed with the group of wading birds. Three Snowy Egrets fed close to it, catching the small aquatic life that the spoonbill disturbed in its active feeding movements.

We watched the spoonbill with binoculars and a Questar telescope for a period of at least 30 minutes. We photographed it and came back to the slough several times during the afternoon to observe it further.

To our knowledge, spoonbills have been reported only once before on the Eufaula Refuge. That was in 1985. *Julian and Rosemary Dusi, 560 Sherwood Drive, Auburn, AL 36830.*

Editor's note: Three spoonbills were seen by a number of observers near the Mobile Causeway from 20-30 July (see also 1988 Spring and Summer sightings p. 27).

25°45'N, 83°00'W to 28°30'N, 86°18'W. The eastern edge of the Yucatan Peninsula lies at about 87°W which makes all the sightings E of any of the peninsula. The initial sightings were approximately 1000 km E of the eastern edge of the Yucatan Peninsula. Thus we believe that many, if not all, the sightings were of flights originating from more eastern areas of Latin America. *David T. Rogers, Jr., Box 1927, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487 and William C. Hollis, 500 Northshore Drive, Gulf Hills, Ocean Springs, MS 39564.*

1987 RECORD YEAR FOR ALABAMA BLUEBIRDS

John Findlay

A recent press release from the Alabama Dept. of Conservation and the annual report of the Alabama Bluebird Management Project of the Alabama Nongame Wildlife Program both indicate that 1987 was a record year for the Eastern Bluebird in Alabama.

The reports stated that efforts to bring back the Eastern Bluebird continued during the third year of the cooperative project which involved concerned individuals and groups across the state. Fourteen workshops held in January and February of 1987 added 53 new cooperators to the program, resulting in a total of 278 cooperators monitoring 2202 bluebird nest boxes. Ninety-two of these reported a total of 3361 bluebirds fledged from their boxes in 1987. The top producer was **Arnold Moore** of Wilsonville who fledged 540 bluebirds from 175 boxes. Second was **John Findlay** of the Birmingham Audubon Society who produced 375 fledglings from 153 boxes. Hard work from all the cooperators is making a big difference in the abundance of bluebirds across the state. Both of the top producers were located in the Mountain Region, fledging a total of 1365 bluebirds.

The Bluebird Management Project's goal is to produce 10,000 bluebirds annually statewide. About 1000 were produced in each of the first three years of the project. Undoubtedly, many more were produced by cooperators that did not send in reports. We would appreciate any information about the success of these trails which would help us to meet our goal.

Those who wish to apply as Bluebird Trail Cooperators should contact Dr. Joseph Meyers, Nongame Wildlife Coordinator, Alabama Game and Fish Division, 64 North Union St. Montgomery, AL 36130. *John Findlay, 2749 Millbrook Road, Birmingham, AL 35243.*

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF AN EXTREME EASTERN MIGRATION ROUTE ACROSS THE GULF OF MEXICO

David T. Rogers and William C. Hollis

An article by Stevenson (*Wilson Bull.* 69:39-77) suggests that there is a well-traveled trans-Gulf migration route that passes east of the Yucatan Peninsula. We believe that we have additional evidence for such a route. On 26 Mar 1987, William Hollis was on a 68-ft racing yacht enroute from Key West, Florida, on a direct course to Biloxi, Mississippi. Winds were from the SE with an overcast sky early in the daylight hours, but winds turned to northerly during late morning. The location of the yacht at 1600 hrs was approximately 25°45'N, 83°00'W with a speed of 8 knots.

Warbler-sized birds flying a northerly course began to arrive on the deck shortly after 0600 hrs. They were flying singly or in pairs, and approximately 15 cm above the water. The weather was getting rough by 1000 hrs and the small birds were often obscured in the troughs between waves. By 1200 hrs the wind was directy from N and the numbers of small birds increased. These birds were perching on anything available including the shoulders of the crew. At 1300 hrs there were dozens of birds on the deck. At 1500 hrs Barn Swallows *(Hirundo rustica)* began to arrive in flocks. These latter birds would not land on the yacht but continued their northward course at an altitude of 25-30 m. There were no birds seen at night during any part of the yacht's course.

Shortly after 0600 hrs on 27 Mar, more warbler-sized birds appeared and began landing on the yacht. There was the same pattern as the day before, smaller birds as singles or pairs and close to the water, with the Barn Swallows in flocks. Small birds were so numerous on deck as to impair walking by the crew. The Barn Swallows began perching high on the rigging but would not get close to people. This activity continued all day of 27 Mar until dusk.

The morning of 28 Mar was calm and foggy at a position 160 km SE of Biloxi at 0600 hrs. There were no small to medium-sized migrating birds seen on 28 Mar. Thus during daylight hours migrating birds were seen continuously over a distance of approximately 450 km from

1988 SPRING AND SUMMER SIGHTINGS

Greg D. Jackson

This is the first records column to cover all of Alabama and Northwest Florida in many years. I hope to publish "Sightings" twice each year in this journal, with the next report for the period August 1988 to February 1989. This column will only be possible if I can obtain records from the various people in our area who receive them from the membership. I hope to include as many interesting observations as are available to me. I would like to emphasize that while some screening of records will occur, publication in this column should in no way be considered verification or substantiation of a report. All extreme rarities will still have to be officially considered by the appropriate records committees.

The weather over the spring and summer can be described in a word: DRY! There were rainfall deficits in all months, with 11.6 inches less than normal in Birmingham from early March to the end of July. The worst variations from normal were in March and June, and the smallest deficiency was in July. Temperatures were fairly normal during the period, though there were unusual cool spells in mid-March and mid-June.

Frontal activity on the coast was rarely associated with heavy rain, and even when it was wet, the birds did not often seem to notice. Best days for passerine birding on the coast were March 26, April 15 and 26, and May 12. Even though numbers of regular migrants were not spectacular, as you will see below, there were some pretty exciting rarities in the region. These included two first Alabama records in late April. The AOS/FOS spring meeting at Dauphin I. April 22-24 recorded 200 species. A Big Day effort on April 16 on the Alabama coast by R. Duncan, P. Tetlow, J. Pfieffer, and K. Wright netted 175 species. Both of these totals are especially impressive when you consider that these days were considered quite slow for migrants!

County names are underscored. "WP" refers to the western Panhandle of Florida (Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa Counties). Records not specifying "FL" or "WP" are in Alabama. "mob" = many observers.

Editor's Note: For easy reading, the day has been placed after the month rather than in front, which is the format followed elsewhere in ***Alabama Birdlife****. Likewise, numbers one through ten are spelled out, rather than using numerals.*

Loons - Boobies: There were three reports of **Pacific Loons** (Pacific/Arctic) on the coast this season, which is surprising for this rare visitor. One basic plumaged bird was at Dauphin I. April 24 (SD,mob). Two birds in basic dress were in the Gulf at Pensacola Beach, June 1 (TAI,JTF) for the fourth WP record, and the fifth and latest ever record for that area was of an alternate plumaged individual seen at Ft. Pickens on June 18 (GF,PT). Pied-billed Grebes are uncommon in summer, and one bird was found in Decatur on July 10 (GDJ,DGJ). An Eared Grebe on April 1 in west Jefferson (TAI) was unusual. This species has become regular at Blakely I., Mobile, where a beautiful alternate plumaged bird was seen April 16 (GDJ,DGJ). The second WP record of **Cory's Shearwater** was of a bird reported at Pensacola Beach on June 1 (TAI,JTF). **Masked Boobies** are rare but regular on our coast, but this spring and summer there was an abundance of reports of this species, with good details on most sightings. A total of seven birds was seen at Dauphin I. during the AOS/FOS meeting April 22-24. One bird was reported at Pensacola Pass, FL, on June 8 (KW), and probably the same bird was noted there on June 11 (RAD). On June 29, four individuals were sighted with four Northern Gannets (rare in summer) at Romar Beach, Baldwin (RAD). Finally, four Masked Boobies were located at Dauphin I. on July 23 (BCG,HHK). More unusual, an immature **Brown Booby** was reported at Ft. Morgan on April 23 (JTF).

Pelicans - Storks: American White Pelicans are common in Mobile Bay in the colder months, and 360 seen at Blakely I. on April 10 (TAI,MN) was a good number for that date. Seven lingering birds were seen from the Mobile Causeway on July 21 (GDJ). Over 1400 Brown Pelicans fledged this summer at Gaillard I. in Mobile Bay, a record number for the state (JMM,RC,JPa). Double-crested Cormorant is uncommon in the Mountain Region, so four birds spotted near Birmingham on April 11 (ALM,MM) were noteworthy. An Anhinga was seen at Lake Land Farms in Perry on July 18 (GDJ). A large wader rookery was located again this year in Hale near Prairieville, with an estimated 15,000 Cattle Egrets, 2500 White Ibis, 500 Little Blue Herons, and a lesser number of Great Egrets (RRR,EGR,mob). The most exciting find of the summer was of three immature **Roseate Spoonbills** in Pinto Pass, Mobile, July 20-30 (DP,mob). This was the sixth record for the state for this species. We had an excellent year for Wood Storks, with reports at a number of sites in the Black Belt in Greene, Hale, Marengo, and Perry, beginning July 9 with 35-40 birds noted near the Gainesville Lock and Dam (MO,SO).

Waterfowl: Quite a few lingering ducks were found this April and May, especially at Blakely Island. Duncan, et al. had 12 species of ducks

on April 16, most at this location. Mottled Ducks have increased considerably on the Alabama coast in the last five years, with the largest numbers at Blakely Island. Two broods were noted there on May 18 (TAI). An injured N. Pintail on May 18 at Blakely I. (TAI) was a late record for the Gulf Coast, and a late Redhead was also recorded at that time. A pair of Blue-winged Teal was found in Hale on June 4 (RRR,EGR); there are two previous nesting records for the Coastal Plain, and this sighting raises the question of local breeding. At Swan Creek WMA in Limestone, two late Gadwalls were spotted on May 22 (GDJ). Also late were a Bufflehead in Shelby on April 12 (GDJ,DGJ), and a Red-breasted Merganser in Winston on May 20 (HHF,JF).

Raptors - Rails: Spring is not usually a good time for seeing large numbers of birds of prey in our area, and this season proved no exception to that rule. Only a few birds were noted at the coastal migration spots this year. Several early arriving Ospreys were noted, including an individual found at Weiss Lake on March 27 (GDJ,DGJ). Thirteen Mississippi Kites were in Greene and Sumter on July 6 (MO,SO). A few Bald Eagles were present through the summer near the Guntersville Dam, and two birds (an adult and an immature) were found through March 13 in Greene neat Eutaw (JF). Melanistic and Krider's forms of the Red-tailed Hawk were spotted at Lake Land Farms in Perry on March 16 (GDJ,DGJ). Several Merlins visited the coast this spring, with one seen April 8 at Ft. Morgan (TAI), several seen April 22-24 at Ft. Morgan and Dauphin I. (AOS/FOS), and the last recorded April 25 at Ft. Morgan (GDJ,DGJ). At least one **Peregrine Falcon** graced the coast this spring, seen during the AOS/FOS weekend. An adult **Golden Eagle** was a treat at Lake Land Farms in Perry on March 13 (HHK,BCG,JH). What was believed to be a fresh dusting site of a Ruffed Grouse was seen in Skyline WMA in Jackson on May 29 (GDJ,DGJ). This species is found in small numbers at that site on the Tennessee border, though it is rarely seen. A late Sora was observed at Decatur on May 10 (ALM,ADM). Purple Gallinule is rare in the Mountain Region, so it was a surprise to find one in a warehouse in Birmingham in late April! Seven of these striking birds were seen May 16 at Gulf Shores (TAI). Both Purple Gallinule and Common Moorhen were seen with downy young at Gulf Shores this summer (PB). American Coot is uncommon in summer, and one individual was seen July 10 at Guntersville (GDJ,DGJ).

Cranes - Godwits: The first spring record of Sandhill Crane for the Tennessee Valley was a bird found at Wheeler NWR on March 6 (GDJ,DGJ). Lesser Golden-Plovers were seen frequently this spring in the region. Largest numbers were 30 birds March 13 in Perry (HHK,BCG,JH), 19 on the same date in Sumter (GDJ,DGJ), and 13 on

March 15 near Guntersville Dam (ALM,ADM). Snowy Plover is becoming quite scarce on our rapidly developing coast, so it was encouraging to hear of an adult at a nest with three eggs at Ft. Morgan on May 11 (EH,NH,TL). The 45 Semipalmated Sandpipers at Blakely I. April 16 was a good number. The 101 American Avocets seen in breeding garb on April 16 at Blakely I. (GDJ,DGJ) were quite a sight, and were enjoyed by many on April 23 (AOS/FOS). This species summers regularly at this location, though as of yet it has not been found nesting (unlike the abundant Black-necked Stilt). Thirty-four birds were present at Blakely I. on May 18 (TAI). A Willet was an unusual inland find on July 10 at Decatur (GDJ,DGJ). In Perry on April 6 were 13 Upland Sandpipers (GDJ,DGJ). Long-billed Curlew used to be a real rarity on the Alabama coast, but in the last five years or so it has become regular in small numbers at the head of Mobile Bay. The latest report this year is of a bird on April 16 feeding with a Marbled Godwit (GDJ,DGJ). Perhaps the same individual was recorded July 20 at the same location (DP,mob), which was an early fall record for the Gulf Coast. **Hudsonian Godwit** is always an exciting bird in our area, and this spring there were two occurrences. Seven were in Pensacola April 13-17 (RAD, mob), and two were spotted on Blakely I. April 16-17 (RAD,mob).

Calidrids - Phalaropes: Five Semipalmated Sandpipers near Faunsdale in Hale on June 4 (RRR,EGR) were late. The largest number of White-rumped Sandpipers reported was 13 in Hale and Perry on June 4 (RRR,EGR). Baird's Sandpipers are generally very rare in the spring, but this year they broke the rules. Two were found in Pensacola April 13-17 (PT,mob); two were at Blakely I. April 16-17 (GDJ,RAD,PT,mob) and again on April 23 (AOS/FOS); one visited Decatur on May 10 (ALM,ADM); and two more birds were seen on Dauphin I. May 17 (RWH,MVH). Pectoral Sandpipers were early at inland areas, with an early spring record for the Mountain Region of six birds on March 1 at Weiss Lake (ALM,MM). Two Pectorals were at Marion in Perry on March 6 (HHK,JH,DD), and one was at Wheeler NWR on the same data (GDJ,DGJ). The prize for rarest bird of the period goes to a visitor from Siberia that spent April 30 and May 1 near Muscle Shoals in Colbert (TMH,GNP,mob). This was an adult, alternate plumaged **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**, which had previously never been recorded in Alabama. Even more special was the time of year, for this was only the sixth record in the spring south of Alaska, and only the second at that season in the eastern U.S.! It is normally recorded in small numbers in the autumn on the West Coast. The bird was documented and photographed by several fortunate observers. Dunlin were in good numbers at Blakely I. on April 16, with 1120 seen (GDJ,DGJ). On the same date at Blakely I.

there were 160 Stilt Sandpipers. The earliest spring arrival for Alabama of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper was at Lake Land Farms in Perry on March 16 (ALM,GDJ,DGJ). Sixteen were found in south Baldwin on April 27 (ALM,ADM). A Short-billed Dowitcher at Decatur on July 10 (GDJ,DGJ) was early, and a Common Snipe was late in Colbert May 1 (GDJ,DGJ). To round out the shorebirds, four Wilson's Phalaropes located at Blakely I. April 16 (GDJ,DGJ) were found again on April 23 (AOS/FOS). This is by far the best spot in the region for this species.

Gulls - Doves: Franklin's Gulls are rare but regular in our region, and in recent years have had records fairly evenly split between the coast and the Tennessee Valley. An adult in alternate plumage was located at Wilson Dam near Florence on April 23 (ALM,ADM). On May 18 at Blakely I., one bird provided a late record for the Gulf Coast and the only May record for the state (TAI). Two molting adults were seen from July 10 through the end of the period with several lingering Ring-billed Gulls at Guntersville (GDJ,DGJ,mob). The controversial "Old One Foot" was seen again at Pensacola on April 23 (RAD). This small dark-backed, pink-legged gull must be at least 13 years old by now. A **Glaucous Gull** was a nice find at the West End of Dauphin I. April 10-22 (JRP,AJ,mob). The rare **Black-legged Kittiwake** that was on the Gulf Breeze, FL, side of the Pensacola Bay Bridge last winter was seen again from March 6-19 (RAD,mob). Ninety Sandwich Terns were at Ft. Morgan on May 17 (TAI). An immature **Sooty Tern** was found April 9 at Ft. Pickens (BCG), providing a rare non-hurricane-related onshore sighting, and the first WP April record. A colony of what was previously thought to be Ringed Turtle Doves near Ft. Walton Beach, FL, was discovered to actually consist of Eurasian Collared Doves. This species is spreading rapidly in south Florida; perhaps colonies may turn up in Alabama in future years. A White-winged Dove was discovered on Dauphin I. April 9 (JRP). Another White-winged Dove appeared at Ft. Morgan April 16-17 (GDJ,DGJ) and at least two were present April 23-28 (AOS/FOS). Perhaps these same birds were found at the late date of May 17 at Ft. Morgan (TAI), and a lone bird was at the same location on July 7 (PB), for a first Gulf Coast record in that month. We have no evidence that these birds nested, though that is certainly a possibility. Four Common Ground Doves May 15 near Lineville in Randolph (DCH) were north of the usual range.

Hummingbirds - Flycatchers: The **Selasphorus** and **Archilochus** hummingbirds (probably Rufous and Black-chinned) that wintered in Mobile, stayed well into March (JAP,mob). An unidentified hummingbird on March 2-3 in Jefferson (CB,PBr) was several weeks earlier than previous Mountain Region records of Ruby-throated Hum-

mingbirds, and at least raises the question of another species. Forty Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were seen at Ft. Morgan April 17 (GDJ,DGJ). This species seemed less abundant this summer, with fewer birds seen at feeders in east Jefferson. However, nearly 300 of these birds were banded this season at that location (RS,MGS). Through gross mismanagement, the once-thriving colony of endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker at Lake Purdy near Birmingham has been reduced to one individual. Fortunately, several colonies have been located this year in the northern portion of the Talladega NF near Jacksonville (BS). An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** was in west Jefferson on May 7 (TAI,AR,MS,LB). The first NW Florida breeding of Eastern Phoebe was established by the discovery of a nest in north Okaloosa in late May (DBW,mob). Young were fledged, and the nest was sent to the Florida State Museum. A **Vermilion Flycatcher** provided the first WP record for March at Ft. Walton Beach on the 22-27 (RAD,mob). A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was seen on Dauphin I. on April 23 (AOS/FOS), and another bird was located at Ft. Morgan on April 25 (GDJ,DGJ). Not quite as rare as the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, but certainly a flashy first state record, was a **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** that was briefly but well seen at Ft. Morgan on April 24 (BS). A large AOS/FOS group had left the fort only minutes before its appearance, and frustratingly the bird vanished and was never relocated.

Swallows - Vireos: Three late Tree Swallows were found at Swan Creek WMA in Limestone on May 22 (GDJ), in an area near the first Alabama nesting location of the species. Cliff Swallows appear to be following suit with the Barn Swallow in their expansion south in recent years. The birds at the head of Mobile Bay seem to be more numerous, with nesting noted under two new bridges and at least 22 birds noted May 15-18 (TAI,MN,MFF). A new inland location for nesting Cliff Swallows is near the I-20 crossing of the Coosa River east of Birmingham (RR,EGR,mob). An early Barn Swallow was seen March 10 at Bayview Lake in Jefferson (TAI). Fish Crows are unusual in the Mountain Region in Jefferson, and up to ten birds were seen March 17-18 at Bayview Lake (TAI). One to two were seen in a new location in Shelby north of Montevallo on April 13 (ALM,MM) and May 7 (HHK,LAB). Single House Wrens were found in two locations in west Birmingham May 2-6 (TAI). The third successful nesting of this species in Alabama was reported in June in Mountain Brook, Jefferson (FS,JS). A late Ruby-crowned Kinglet was on Dauphin I. on April 16 (GDJ,DGJ). The **Sage Thrasher** discovered March 26-29 at a campground at Navarre in Santa Rosa (BH,CT,mob) was the third WP record, and only the fifth for Florida. A **Bell's Vireo**, quite rare in the spring, was reported from Dauphin I. on

April 9 (RWH). Late Solitary Vireos were seen May 20 in Birmingham (TAI), and two birds seen May 30 in the Sipsey Wild Area of Lawrence (BCG,HHK). The latter record raises the question of nesting. On April 28, a Warbling Vireo was observed at Ft. Morgan (ALM). Three Philadelphia Vireos May 7 on the Birmingham Area Spring Count represented a good number for that season. **Black-whiskered Vireo** is rare but regular on the coast in late April, and this year several birds were found at Ft. Morgan April 22-28 (AOS/FOS,GDJ,DGJ,ALM).

Wood Warblers - Buntings: Orange-crowned Warblers were more noticeable than usual this spring. A late Gulf Coast record was set on April 26 at Ft. Morgan (GDJ). Up to three birds were seen April 3 and 13 in Birmingham (GDJ,DGJ,BCG). A late Magnolia Warbler was in north Shelby on May 19 (GDJ). A Swainson's Warbler was found singing at Bayview Lake in west Jefferson April 4 to June 23 (TAI). A single bird was found in a traditional spot north of Montevallo in Shelby on April 13 (ALM,MM), and three individuals were on the Birmingham Area Spring Count on May 7. Unfortunately, the long-established nesting area in NW Shelby at Turner has been destroyed. Wilson's Warblers are difficult to find in the spring, and we have records this season of birds at Dauphin I. and Ft. Morgan on April 22-24 (AOS/FOS), two near Birmingham on May 7, and one in Birmingham on May 11 (TAI). Single **Western Tanagers** were seen on Dauphin I. April 16 (KW,JP), and the following day at Ft. Morgan (LD). The **Black-headed Grosbeak** that wintered in Pensacola, FL, was noted through at least March 19 (JP,mob). Painted Bunting is uncommon at the head of Mobile Bay in summer, and probably breeds. Two singing males were noted on Blakely I. on May 18 (TAI).

Dickcissel - Evening Grosbeak: Dickcissels were widespread in the Black Belt this season, and were even found exhibiting territorial activity near Birmingham (RS,MGS,PF). Bachman's Sparrow is very uncommon in the Mountain Region, so it was encouraging to find a new site west of Columbiana in Shelby in mid-May (HHF,JF). The only Lark Sparrow reported was at Ft. Morgan on April 25 (GDJ,DGJ); this species is much easier to locate in the early fall on the coast. A Grasshopper Sparrow was seen April 16-17 and 23-24 at Ft. Morgan (RAD,PT,mob). The LeConte's Sparrow is rare in the Tennessee Valley, and the birds noted this winter in Lauderdale lingered into the spring, with three noted on March 19 (DJS,GNP,mob). Three White-crowned Sparrows were at Ft. Morgan on April 17 (GDJ,DGJ). The Brewer's Blackbird seen at Lake Land Farms in Perry on April 13 (ALM,MM) was late. The first House Finches found in the WP wintered in Pensacola; the three birds

stayed through March 28 (JP,mob). Another House Finch was noted in Pensacola on April 23 (LG).Pine Siskins remained abundant into the early spring in most locales. On March 26, 150 were at Montrose in Baldwin (VBF). The last date for the Gulf Coast this year was May 9 at Gulf Shores (PB). On the Birmingham Area Spring Count on May 7, 346 Pine Siskins were recorded. Finally, a few Evening Grosbeaks made a late appearance in the Birmingham area this spring after a winter in which they were scarce. There were five sightings of from one to four birds from March 20 to April 25.

Observers: Alabama Ornithological Society, Paul Blevins, Charles Brasfield, Peggy Brasfield (PBr), Lela Anne Brewer, Linda Buzzard, Roger Clay, Don Darnell, Lucy Duncan, Robert A. Duncan, Scot Duncan, Harriett H. Findlay, John Findlay, Gene Fleming, Florida Ornithological Society, Mary F. Floyd, Paul Franklin, Venetia B. Friend, John T. Fulton, Ben C. Garmon, Lyn Gould, Thomas M. Haggerty, John Harris, Ralph W. Havard, Elizabeth Hill, Barbara Hoffman, Nick Holler, Dan C. Holliman, Thomas A. Imhof, Debra G. Jackson, Greg D. Jackson, Albert Jenkins, Helen H. Kittinger, Ted Laroe, Mabel McDonald, Al D. Miller, Ann L. Miller, Joseph M. Myers, Minnie Nonkes, Michael Owens, Suzanne Owens, Jeff Parrish (JPa), Jo Ann Pate, Dee Patterson, Jo Ree Pennell, James Pfieffer, G. Ned Piper, Elberta G. Reid, Robert R. Reid, Ari Rutkoff, Martha G. Sargent, Robert Sargent, Maureen Shaffer, Frances Shepherd, James Shepherd, Bill Summerour, Phil Tetlow, Charlie Thompson, Mark Van Hoose, Donald B. Ware, Kenny Wright.
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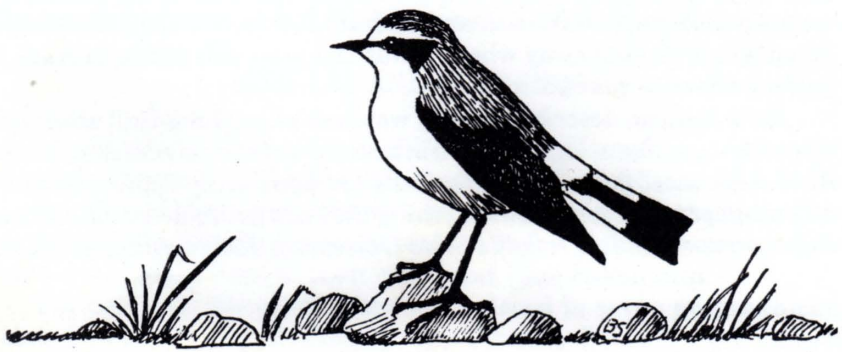

NOTES OF INTEREST

A case of mistaken identity. While watching a Wood Pewee hawking insects near one of the trails through the shell mounds on Dauphin Island this past November, I was surprised to see the bird suddenly dart from its perch and fly straight toward me at eye level. When it was a few feet from my face and still coming, I closed my eyes and a second later felt it light on the top of my head! After a half minute or so (it seemed longer), the bird launched into the air, snapped an insect, and settled back on my head! A minute later it took off and vanished into the woods, not to be seen again. I was once mistaken for a stump by a Black-and-white Warbler while sitting in the woods turkey hunting, but this was the first time I had ever been used as a fence post! *Bill Summerour, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama 36265.*

Laughing Gull puzzled by puffer's defense. While standing on a narrow crescent of sand beach near the airport marsh on Dauphin Island, my attention was drawn to a Laughing Gull that lit nearby in the water's edge, holding an inflated puffer in its mouth. The puffer was about the size of a tennis ball, requiring that the gull stretch its mouth as wide open as possible in order to hold the fish. It stood for several minutes puzzled as to how to go about swallowing a three-inch ball; normal swallowing procedures were obviously unworkable and out of the question. Appearing at a loss as to how to solve the problem, the gull finally dropped the fish into the water where it promptly floated like a white balloon and bobbed about on the surface whenever the gull tried to peck it.

After watching for about ten minutes, I decided to rush the bird while the puffer was floating in the water, hoping to frighten it away so that I could examine the fish. But instead of flying off in a panic when I charged with arms waving, it looked at me, startled, then back at the puffer, then ran over and grabbed the fish and took off! It flew to a shell island about 30 meters (100 feet) away where it was last seen still trying to crack the puffer's effective survival strategy.

Scott Duncan described having watched a Laughing Gull attempting to swallow a snake or legless lizard in an earlier edition of *Alabama Birdlife* 34: 6. Like most gulls, Laughing Gulls are apparently opportunists that will attempt to eat just about anything they can get their mouths around. *Bill Summerour, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL 36265.*

WINTER MEETING AT NAVARRE BEACH

The winter AOS meeting will be in northwest Florida on Santa Rosa Island on the weekend of 27-29 January. We have not held a meeting in this portion of our AOS area in quite some time, and it should be a good time of year to visit. Field trips will be offered to a variety of good birding spots from Pensacola to Destin. We are planning a banquet on Saturday night, and we will probably have an informal gathering on Friday night.

We will be headquartered at the Holiday Inn Navarre Beach, which is a Holidome Resort. A block of 40 rooms has been reserved for our group at a cost of $36 for standard and poolside rooms and $40 for beachfront rooms. For more than two persons in a room, there is a $6 per person charge. Children under 17 stay free with parents or guardians. These rooms must be reserved individually, and this should be done by 13 January to guarantee the group rate. You may call 1-800- HOLIDAY for reservations; be sure to mention that you are part of the AOS group.

The Yellowhammer will offer more details in early January. A form will be provided for registration and for the banquet. We look forward to birding with you at the Gulf!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following is a partial list of this year's Christmas Counts. If you plan to participate in any of these counts, check with the coordinator to make sure that the date listed is correct or has not changed. Compilers please send your results to Tom Imhof as soon as possible so that the summary can be published in the next issue of *Alabama Birdlife*.

Sat. Dec. 17	Waterloo	Ned Piper	381-4649
Sat. Dec. 17	Mobile Delta	John Winn	690-2584 (work) 666-1317 (home)
Sat. Dec. 17	Wheeler	Milton Harris	895-6377
Mon. Dec. 19	Tuscaloosa	Jim Thompson	556-2168
Wed. Dec. 21	Eufaula	Sam Pate	(404) 324-1392
Mon. Dec. 26	Dauphin Island	John Winn	690-2584 (work) 666-1317 (home)
Mon. Dec. 26	Fort Morgan	Minnie Nonkes	928-0296
Mon. Dec. 26	Birmingham	Tom Imhof	787-1046
Wed. Dec. 28	Perdido Bay	Ann and Dan Forster	(904) 454-4421
Sat. Dec. 31	Gulf Shores	Greg Jackson	987-2855

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