

1988 SPRING AND SUMMER SIGHTINGS

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This is the first records column to cover all of Alabama and North-west 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. Pfeiffer, 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

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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 near 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 date (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.

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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.

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