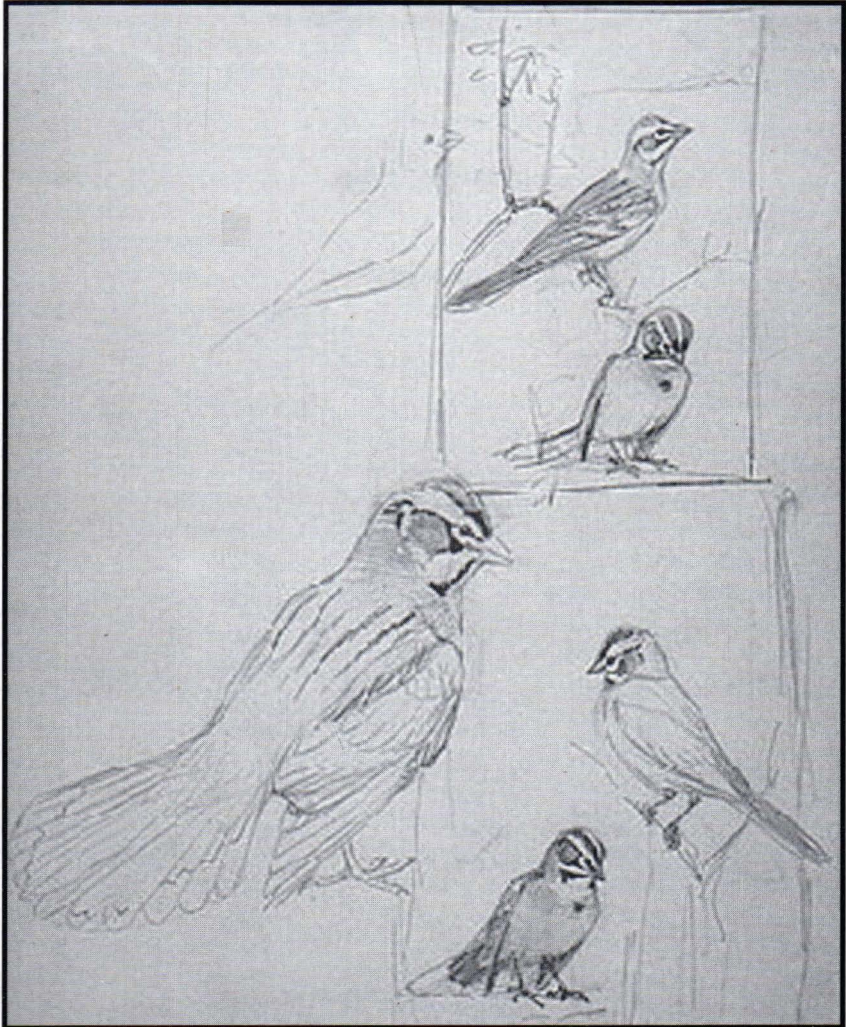


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Cover: Lark Sparrow by Louis Agassiz Fuentes, 1902c

UNUSUAL PREY OF SHARP-SHINNED (*ACCIPITER STRIATUS*) AND COOPER'S (*A. COOPERII*) HAWKS IN FLORIDA

Douglas B. McNair and Thomas E. Lewis

On 21 February 1999, McNair watched an adult Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), presumably a female based on its large size, kill a first-year female Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) at Apalachicola, Franklin County, Florida. The hawk approached low over river marshes alongside Scipio Creek which was 100 ft wide (30.5 m) and flushed a flock of ca. 600 Lesser Scaup (first-year and adult birds of both sexes) which were feeding and resting on the water. The hawk pursued a scaup which had separated from the flock. This scaup flew over the marsh which separated Scipio Creek from the broad Apalachicola River toward which the scaup was heading. The Sharp-shinned Hawk, however, turned abruptly and quickly rose above the scaup, forcing the scaup to turn about 90 degrees and veer downward toward the marsh. The hawk quickly descended over the back of the scaup, grasped its neck and base of the head with its talons, and with a mutual flurry of wings, the hawk landed on the ground in the marsh with the scaup underneath it. The Sharp-shinned Hawk remained at the site for at least 15 min but feeding was not observed because marsh grass hid the birds from view.

The mean mass of female Sharp-shinned Hawks is 174-179 g (Palmer 1988), ca. 25% of the mean mass of first-year Lesser Scaups (647-761 g) (Austin et al. 1998). This is by far the heaviest prey killed by Sharp-shinned Hawks that has been adequately documented (Bent 1937, Sherrod 1978, Palmer 1988). Sharp-shinned Hawks regularly kill birds as large as adult Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) (range of mean mass in United States: 162-233 g; Brennan 1999) and Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*) (mean mass: ca. 173 g; Brown et al. 1998). They usually carry quail to plucking perches to eat (Bent 1937, Palmer 1988). Sharp-shinned Hawks may also kill other Sharp-shinned Hawks (Palmer 1988), and possibly, birds as heavy as adult Rock Doves (*Columba livia*) (mean mass: 347 g; Johnston 1992). Sharp-shinned Hawks have attacked species as large as Pileated Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*) (mass range: 229-325 g; Bull and Jackson 1995), but without killing them (Bent 1937, Palmer 1988). A Sharp-shinned Hawk once knocked down to the ground a full-grown Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) (mass range: 727-1014 g; Davis 1993) flying across a marsh, possibly with the intent of eating it but without killing it (Bent 1937, Palmer 1988).

On 30 January 1999 at 0800 hr, Lewis watched an immature Cooper's Hawk (*A. cooperii*) attempt to catch a mullet (*Mugil sp.*) at Indian Pass, Franklin County, Florida. The hawk was first noted diving toward the water near the refuge boathouse on St. Vincent Island. It then hit the water with outstretched talons 15 ft (4.6 m) from the shoreline. The hawk emerged from the 20 cm deep water with a 25 cm long mullet in its

talons which it lifted two ft (0.6 m) above the water before dropping the fish. The Cooper's Hawk circled the site several times before disappearing over the forested ridge of St. Vincent Island. The mullet was apparently not severely injured for no sign of it was apparent when Lewis checked the site within 10 sec of the attack. The estimated mass of the mullet was 285 g, based on the mass of mullets of similar length in local fish markets.

Fish are a rare item in the diet of Cooper's Hawk (Rosenfield 1988). The single documented successful capture of fish by Cooper's Hawk occurred in Arkansas during a drought where one bird on several occasions fed on minnows in a desiccating pool (Bent 1937, Rosenfield 1988). Sharp-shinned Hawks are not documented to have included fish in their diet (Sherrod 1978, Palmer 1988).

In summary, this note documents the capacity of *Accipiter* hawks to opportunistically capture (Sharp-shinned Hawk), or attempt to capture (Cooper's Hawk), unusual prey.

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FOURTH VERIFIED RECORD OF VAUX'S SWIFT (*CHAETURA VAUXI*) IN FLORIDA

Douglas B. McNair and Thomas E. Lewis

Webber and Collins (1995) and McNair and Lewis (1997) reviewed the status of Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) in Florida, which included documentation of the three verified records, all in the 1990s, once (recordings of vocalizations) at Gainesville, Alachua County (Webber and Collins 1995), and twice (recordings of vocalizations, photographs) at Apalachicola, Franklin County (McNair and Lewis 1997). This note provides documentation for the fourth verified record (photographs) of Vaux's Swift, at the same site in Apalachicola in northwest Florida.

We observed two Vaux's Swifts roosting in a chimney of the Apalachicola town hall on 23 November 1997. Subsequently, we observed one bird from 2-15 December. Their roosting behavior was similar to the small flock of Vaux's Swifts we observed in the winter of 1995-1996 (McNair and Lewis 1997). On 15 December 1997, we captured the single Vaux's Swift in the chimney at 1756 hr, then banded (2121-79482) and photographed the bird (Figure 1). The bird's mass at 1830 hr was 17.4 g and on 16 December (0830 hr), when we released the bird, was 15.3 g, an overnight loss of 12%. On 15 December, the fat class was 0 although the swift had a food bolus in its crop. Other data were: body length: 108 mm; wing length (chord/flattened [erroneously stated as maximum flattened in McNair and Lewis 1997]): 110/113 mm; tail length (central rectrices including spines): 37.5 mm; tarsus: 10.8 mm; and bill length (base of forehead/anterior edge of nostril): 5.3/3.45 mm. The plumage was fresh and unworn, including sharp tips on all spines of the rectrices. The green iridescence on the wings was extensive, especially on the inner primaries, and the "bandit" mask on the face was pronounced. Spots of dried mud were present on the bill and anterior crown feathers. Molt was complete. We detected no parasites. The feet were in good condition. The chin, throat and upper breast were off-white for 23.5 mm along the body axis and sharply demarcated from the brownish-gray middle breast. The rump and upper tail coverts were brownish-gray, noticeably paler than the back and rectrices. Mensural data, especially the short wings and tail, confirm that the swift we banded was a Vaux's Swift and was probably an adult (McNair and Lewis 1997, Pyle 1997). Despite our mensural and plumage data, and plumage characteristics cited in Pyle (1997), we were unsure whether the bird we banded was of the migratory race *C. v. vauxi*, rather than *C. v. tamaulipensis*, which is possibly migratory (see McNair and Lewis 1997). We believe, however, that our data, including reexamination of our notes and photographs from earlier observations (McNair and Lewis 1997), suggest the subspecies is most likely *C. v. vauxi*. We emphasize that specimens should be collected to positively determine the racial identity of Vaux's Swifts in Florida.

In summary, we document the fourth verified record of Vaux's Swift in Florida. We

verified records of Vaux's Swifts in each of the three winters (1994-1996, 1997-1998) in which we detected this species at Apalachicola.



Figure 1. Vaux's Swift captured at Apalachicola, Franklin County, Florida, 15 December 1997. See text for complete description. Note that the chin, throat, and upper breast are lighter than the remainder of the underparts. Photo by T. E. Lewis.

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**FIRST NEST RECORD OF THE LARK SPARROW
(*CHONDESTES GRAMMACUS*) IN ALABAMA**

Dean R. Cutten and Raelene H. Cutten

On 3 May 1998, while travelling south along Fennell Road in Limestone County, approximately 3 mi (4.8 km) from Belle Mina, two birds flew up from the edge of the dirt road. The birds were relocated at the edge of the grassy right of way and a newly sown cotton field, and were immediately identified as Lark Sparrows (*Chondestes grammacus*). The two birds spent the next few minutes foraging in the grass, and one individual strutted, raised its head feathers and repeatedly fanned its tail revealing white-tipped rectrices. Both birds then flew to the other side of the road and landed on the sparsely vegetated ground. Again one bird fanned its tail after standing on clumps of dirt and at one time was seen tugging at a dry grass stalk as if trying to pull it out of the ground. High-pitched, sharp "tsep" calls were given repeatedly, but no song was heard. We observed the pair for about 10 min and concluded they probably had formed a pair bond.

We returned to the nest area on 9 May. Because of the observations made on 3 May and because the dry, grassy right of way adjacent to an almost bare field appeared to be suitable breeding habitat for Lark Sparrows (Imhof 1976, *Alabama Birds*), we looked for a nest. After a few minutes of searching, a Lark Sparrow flushed and landed near the edge of the road. When we examined the area from which the individual had flushed, a nest was located in a slight depression in the ground that was partly surrounded by a dry wiry weed clump. The nest, which contained four near-white eggs marked with a few brownish speckles (Figure 1), was a deep cup made mostly from fine dry weed stalks and rootlets. It appeared to be well camouflaged even from the open side of the weed clump and was very difficult to see when observed from a distance of a few feet (Figure 2). Furthermore, the nest was on the northeast side of the weed clump and was therefore shaded. Others also have noted that Lark Sparrows often select shaded nest sites (Imhof 1976). The female Lark Sparrow was a tight sitter and allowed us to photograph the nest at a distance of eight ft (2.4 m) (Figure 2).

On 17 May, we returned to the nest site area and found that it had been mowed. The nest was partially destroyed and the eggs were gone, but a Lark Sparrow pair was still in the area. On 24 May, only a singing male Lark Sparrow was located in the cotton field near the old nest site. Visits to the area after this date failed to find any Lark Sparrows. Further, the right-of-way on the east side of the road had been mowed and the area no longer appeared suitable for nesting.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first documented Lark Sparrow nest in Alabama. Although Imhof (1976) cites five breeding records, only dependent young were reported. Breeding season sightings have primarily been in the Tennessee Valley and western portion of the Upper Coastal Plain with a few sightings in the Mountain

Region and Gulf Coast (Imhof 1976, G. D. Jackson, pers. com.). In Red Bank, Lawrence County, individuals have been seen annually during the breeding season since 1993, with up to eight adults reported in a given year. Many of these reports suggested that the Lark Sparrows observed were probably nesting (G. D. Jackson pers. com.).



Figure 1. Lark Sparrow nest and eggs at Belle Mina, Limestone County. Photo by Dean Cutten.



Figure 2. Female Lark Sparrow on nest at Belle Mina, Limestone County. Photo by Dean Cutten.

Dean R. Cutten and Raelene H. Cutten, 107 McDermott's Way, Madison, AL 35758

SPRING SIGHTINGS (MARCH 1 - MAY 31, 1998)*

RED-THROATED LOON - Up to five were at Guntersville, Marshall Co., AL, March 25 - April 2 (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson, Steve W. McConnell, Philip Johnson, D. Arnold).

PACIFIC LOON - An alternate-plumaged individual was in Escambia Co., FL, April 23 (Ed Case).

EARED GREBE - One at Dauphin Island, Mobile Co., AL, April 18, was farther east than normal (Greg D. Jackson).

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL - Four were seen on a foray into the Gulf of Mexico off Baldwin Co., AL, May 23 (Greg D. Jackson and others).

BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL - Eight to nine were counted on a foray into the Gulf of Mexico off Baldwin Co., AL, May 23, providing the 4th AL record (Greg D. Jackson and others). Also, an individual that had been banded in the Azores in 1993, was brought to Pensacola Wildlife Rescue, Escambia Co., FL, April 28 (A. Forster, *fide* Robert A. Duncan, Lucy Duncan).

GLOSSY IBIS - One in Okaloosa Co., FL, March 4 - 9, was unusual for northwest Florida (Ed Case, Robert A. Duncan).

OLDSQUAW - A male was in Walton Co., FL, March 14 (M. Rose), and six were in Escambia Co., FL, March 18 (Phil Tetlow, Betsy Tetlow).

SURF SCOTER - One was below Colbert Ferry Bridge in Lauderdale Co., AL, May 2 (Tom Haggerty, Jeff Garner).

BLACK SCOTER - One was at Dauphin Island, Mobile Co., AL, March 27 - 29 (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson, others).

HOODED MERGANSER - In Escambia Co., two hatchlings from suspicious eggs collected Feb. 13, from a Wood Duck nest and incubated by a chicken in Escambia Co., and a Wood Duck box housing a female Hooded Merganser and her 12 eggs in the same area, March 24, were the first breeding records for northwest FL (C. Davis, *fide* Robert A. Duncan).

MISSISSIPPI KITE - One in Colbert Co., May 15, was the 2nd record for northwest AL (Tom Haggerty, Jeff Garner).

RUFFED GROUSE - Since rarely detected, one drumming in Jackson Co., AL, March 22, was an exciting find (Greg D. Jackson, Philip Johnson).

BLACK RAIL - One was observed at Dauphin Island, Mobile, AL, April 17 - 18 (C. Snow, Michael W. Russell, others).

KING RAIL - Two in Lauderdale Co., AL, May 6, were unusual for extreme north-west Alabama (Steve W. McConnell, Damien J. Simbeck, Jeff Garner).

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER - One in Baldwin Co., AL, April 19, was a rare local visitor (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson, others).

BLACK-NECKED STILT - A nest with eggs in Colbert Co., AL, May 21, provided the first confirmed inland nesting record (Tom Haggerty, Jeff Garner; see *Alabama Birdlife* 44: 8).

UPLAND SANDPIPER - Thirteen were seen in Baldwin Co., AL, April 27 (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson).

HUDSONIAN GODWIT - One in Okaloosa Co., April 22, was northwest Florida's 5th record (Robert A. Duncan et al.). Another was a good find in Colbert Co., AL, May 10-12 (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson, many observers).

STILT SANDPIPER - A single individual in Colbert Co., AL, May 3, was locally rare (Greg D. Jackson).

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER - One in Okaloosa Co., FL, April 9, provided only the 3rd northwest Florida record (Robert A. Duncan).

RUFF - A female found in Mobile Co., AL, May 17 - 19, was the 4th Alabama record (B.C. Garmon, many observers).

WILSON'S PHALAROPE - One in Okaloosa Co., FL, April 22, was locally rare (Robert A. Duncan).

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE - One was in Mobile Co., AL, May 22 (G. E. Hill, Greg D. Jackson, Philip Johnson) and four were 81 mi off Baldwin Co., AL, May 23 (Greg D. Jackson, others).

POMARINE JAEGER - One was off Dauphin Island, Mobile Co., AL, March 28 (Greg D. Jackson and others), and another 81 mi off Baldwin Co., AL, May 23 (Greg D. Jackson, others).

FRANKLIN'S GULL - One in Colbert Co., AL, May 6, was farther east than normal (Steve W. McConnell, Damien J. Simbeck, Jeff Garner).

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL - Different individuals were seen in Marshall Co., AL, March 8 (Steve W. McConnell, others) and March 25 (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson, D. Reynolds).

GLAUCOUS GULL - One was in Baldwin Co., AL, April 18 - 26 (B. Blakeslee, B. James, Robert A. Duncan, Greg D. Jackson).

WHITE-WINGED DOVE - One in Okaloosa Co., FL, April 22, was farther east than usual (Robert A. Duncan).

GROOVE-BILLED ANI - Two to three wintering in Escambia, FL, remained to April 21 (D. and A. Norfolk, *vide* Robert A. Duncan).

SHORT-EARED OWL - One in Marshall Co., AL, March 15, was a rare visitor (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson).

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER - One in Cleburne Co., AL, May 16, was farther east than normal (Terrence L. Schiefer, Marion Schiefer).

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER - One in Jefferson Co., AL, May 25, was rare and tied the record late date for Alabama (Greg D. Jackson).

COUCH'S/TROPICAL KINGBIRD - One in Mobile Co., AL, May 22, was the 4th Alabama record (Steve W. McConnell).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER - One in Escambia Co., FL, May 11, was exceptionally far east and was the second area May record (Robert A. Duncan, Lucy Duncan).

WARBLING VIREO - A territorial male in Lauderdale Co., AL, May 31, was in an area where the species was first noted in 1994 (Steve W. McConnell).

RED-EYED VIREO - An estimated 1700+ on Dauphin Island, Mobile Co., AL, April 28, provided a new Alabama high count (Greg D. Jackson).

YELLOW-GREEN VIREO - One studied in Escambia Co., FL, May 11, was northwest Florida's 5th record (Robert A. Duncan, H. Barbig).

CAVE SWALLOW - Alabama's 11th record was in Baldwin Co., April 11 (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson, others).

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH - One was late in Madison Co., AL, May 5 (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson).

BEWICK'S WREN - A rare sight was a singing individual in Escambia Co., FL, March 21 (L. Case, Ed Case, C. Ascherfeld, *vide* Robert A. Duncan).

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER - A male in Escambia Co., April 27 - 28, was the first record for northwest Florida (Robert A. Duncan, Dick Ballman).

CONNECTICUT WARBLER - An individual was seen in Jefferson, Co., AL, on May 16 and May 25 (Pelham Rowan, Greg D. Jackson).

MOURNING WARBLER - One in Jefferson, Co., AL, May 17, was a rare spring find (H. Findlay, Pelham Rowan, Greg D. Jackson).

SCARLET TANAGER - On April 28, the 750+ that were seen on Dauphin Island, Mobile Co., AL, set the new record high for Alabama (Greg D. Jackson).

WESTERN TANAGER - One in Escambia Co., May 11, was the first May record for northwest Florida (Robert A. Duncan, others).

LARK SPARROW - Two in Lawrence Co. and a breeding pair in Limestone Co., AL, May 3, were in an area where small numbers have regularly bred in recent years (Dean Cutten, Greg D. Jackson, others) (see pp. 22-23 of this issue of *Alabama Birdlife*).

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK - One in Escambia Co., April 20, was northwest Florida's 2nd spring record (T. McCaskey, *vide* Robert A. Duncan).

SHINY COWBIRD - Recorded in Escambia, Co., FL, April 8 and April 19 (Robert A. Duncan, B. Bremser), in Baldwin Co., AL, April 27 - 28, and on Dauphin Island, Mobile Co., AL, April 28 (Greg D. Jackson, Debra G. Jackson).

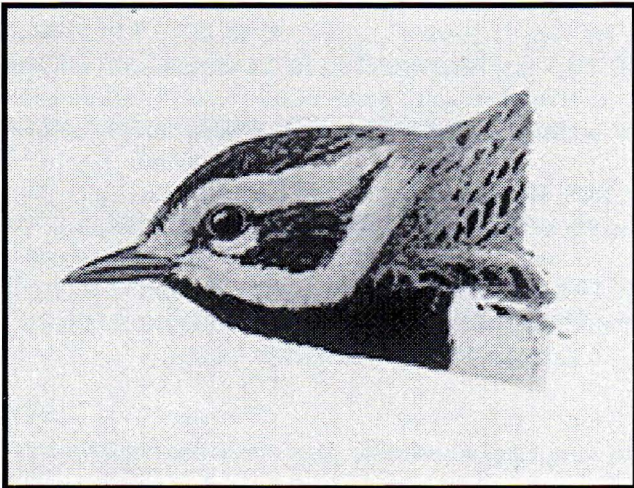
* **Editors Note** - Sightings and annotations published in *Field Notes* 52:340-344.

FROM THE EDITOR

It is with great pleasure that I begin my tenure as editor of *Alabama Birdlife*. I will make every effort to make *Alabama Birdlife* one of the best regional bird journals in the country. To help me accomplish this goal, I have asked Paul Kittle and Jeff Garner to serve as assistant editors. Both of these AOS members have publication experience and share my view that regional bird journals play an important role in increasing our knowledge and appreciation of birds. I am also happy to announce that Greg Jackson has agreed to resume his "seasons sightings" article in Volume 45 No. 2. Greg's knowledge of bird identification and distribution is unbeatable. *Alabama Birdlife* is lucky to have someone of his skill level volunteer his services.

The success of *Alabama Birdlife*, however, really depends on the support of the AOS membership. A journal is only as good as the articles it contains. Those articles must come primarily from the membership. Backyard birders, serious listers, conservation biologists, bird banders, students, and professional ornithologists can all make significant contributions to our understanding and appreciation of Alabama and north-west Florida birds by publishing their field work in *Alabama Birdlife*. Further, if you have criticisms, comments, or ideas that you think can improve *Alabama Birdlife*, please share them with us.

Finally, I would like to thank Daniel J. Drennen for serving as editor of *Alabama Birdlife* for the last four years. All of his work is greatly appreciated. Also, thanks to Bill Summerour and to Charles Kennedy for their interim efforts and to Mark Wilson and Mary Beth Campbell for helping me get on my editorial feet.



Townsend's Warbler by Louis Agassiz Furtés

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING ARTICLES

Manuscripts submitted for publication in *Alabama Birdlife* should conform to the guidelines listed below. *Articles should include some facet of bird ecology, natural history, behavior, management/conservation or other related topics.* Refer to this issue or to recent past issues for examples. *Alabama Birdlife* is published twice a year: deadlines for submitting articles are 1 **June** and 1 **November**. If you have access to an IBM compatible or Macintosh computer, it saves time and money if you submit your manuscript on a 3 1/2 inch floppy disk along with the hard copy (Word or WordPerfect preferred).

Submit manuscripts typed and double spaced on 8 1/2 x 11 inch typing paper.

Black and white photos are preferred, but color prints and slides are acceptable.

The title should be in CAPS. If the name of a species is used in the title, it should be followed by the scientific name in parentheses, e.g. CONNECTICUT WARBLER (*OPORORNIS AGILIS*)

The author's name should be in lower case and centered under the title.

If the article is coauthored by a married couple bearing the same last name, the names should be kept separate, e.g. John B. Brown and Sarah D. Brown.

Whenever a species name is used for the first time in the body of an article, it should be followed by the scientific name in parentheses, e.g. Connecticut Warbler (*Oporornis agilis*).

When using dates, the day should be placed before the month, e.g. 13 April 1992.

Spell out numbers ten and under and use numerals for numbers 11 and above.

Distances should be expressed in English units followed by the metric equivalent in parentheses, e.g. 6.2 miles (10 km). Use only the metric system for scientific measurements, e.g. wing 10.3 cm; tail 15.6 cm.

The titles of tables should be in CAPS and placed above the tables.

The description of figures should be in lower case and placed beneath the figure.

Refer to the Literature Cited in this issue for the correct way to state references.

Three or fewer references should be incorporated into the text of the article rather than listed separately at the end, e.g. Imhof (1976, *Alabama Birds*).

The author's name and full address should be line typed at the end of the article. The name used should match the name given under the title.

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