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Cover: Bald Eagle

## HORNED LARKS (*EREMOPHILA ALPESTRIS*) NESTING IN THE COASTAL PLAIN OF ALABAMA

Patricia L. Johnson and Lawrence F. Gardella

Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) expanded their range into Alabama during the first half of the 20th century as part of a southern expansion that brought breeding Horned Larks to Kentucky between 1910 and 1920 (Beason 1995). Imhof (1976) described Horned Larks as breeding locally in the Tennessee Valley and the eastern portion of the Mountain Region, but listed no summer records in Alabama south of Birmingham. Beason (1995) reports no breeding in the coastal or coastal plain regions of any of the southeastern states except Louisiana, where they apparently are found in the flood plain of the Mississippi River. Griffin (1951) first documented breeding in north Georgia in April 1950. In June 1991, Patterson (1991) found indications that Horned Larks were probably breeding in Dublin, which is in Georgia's coastal plain. Six years later, Chandler *et al.* (1997) first documented breeding Horned Larks at a sod farm in Georgia's coastal plain in Bulloch County. The objective of this note is to document breeding at a sod farm in the coastal plain of Alabama, at approximately the same latitude as Dublin and Bulloch counties, Georgia.

In January 1999, we observed Horned Larks feeding along the roads and near slightly higher portions of the Woerner Turf and Sod Farm between Sinclair and Lowndesboro in Lowndes County, Alabama. Johnson went to this sod farm frequently over the next several months and usually encountered Horned Larks, most often near the roads. On 22 May 1999, Johnson found a juvenile Horned Lark not far from two adults. Although she watched the birds for over an hour, she never saw the adults feed the juvenile. On 6 June 1999, Johnson watched what she believed to be a male Horned Lark catching insects on the road. A female lark was in an adjacent field, moving about in a small area. The male would fly low to the field and cautiously walk toward the female lark with the food in his mouth. Both then moved to a tall weed with overhanging leaves. The male then began feeding the insects to birds out of view that were thought to be young in a nest, which apparently was tucked in against the base of the weed. Male Horned Larks rarely feed their young (Beason 1995). Johnson could not get close enough to see the adult transfer food to the young. When she returned on 9 June, the field had been mown, and there was no sign of the nest or the larks.

On 11 June 1999, Johnson located two adult larks and a juvenile in the same

general area, one field to the south. On 20 June 1999, Johnson observed two adult Horned Larks in a plowed field with no vegetation. They repeatedly made twittering sounds and flew up and landed near the same spot. Although the birds remained together, Johnson did not see them mating. One of them moved underneath a very large dirt clod and settled in for approximately fifteen minutes. The other lark remained nearby. Johnson checked the area, but could find no nest. After a week of heavy rains, she found the clod dissipated, and the field covered with water.

On 4 July 1999, Johnson saw a female Horned Lark collecting vegetation in her mouth, apparently to use as nesting material. On 6 July, the authors watched one lark walking and feeding in a low area with short grass. The lark then flew directly to the area of higher weeds where Johnson had earlier observed a female Horned Lark with nesting material. After searching the area, however, no evidence of nesting was found. An hour later, Johnson watched the lark fly to the same area, but could not observe more closely, because a tractor was mowing the weeds. After the whole area was mown, there were two Horned Larks on the side of the road. One sat on the cement at the edge of the road and called.

On 11 July 1999, the authors and Fred Bassett visited the Woerner Sod and Turf Farm and located a Horned Lark nest. The female flew into the unplowed field near where we were standing [perhaps 0.3 mile (0.43 km) from the west gate] and put some vegetation under a weed. After she flew off, Gardella walked over to the spot and picked up part of the weed to expose a nest in which the vegetation was arranged into a cup. During the afternoon of 13 July 1999, Johnson and Tommy Pratt noticed Horned Larks at the eastern portion of the sod farm. There were at least three adults and four juveniles. Pratt saw one of the adults feed a juvenile. Back at the western portion of the sod farm, Johnson and Pratt relocated the nest. One egg was lying on the ground by the weeds, and another was in the nest, which was now lined with grass. It appeared deep enough so that a mower could go over it and not destroy it.

Harrison (1975) described a Horned Lark nest as a shallow cup of coarse stems and leaves and lined with fine grasses. It often has a "patio" of small pebbles or clods. The nest that we discovered lacked a "patio". It was also less shallow than we had expected. On 14 July, Johnson and Gardella returned to the unplowed field in the western portion of the farm and found two eggs in the nest. Back on the eastern portion, there were at least eight or nine Horned Larks. Some were rather streaked and had no black on their faces. We assumed that they had recently fledged. Others had some blackish smudges on their faces, and we deemed them to be older. This group included at least two adults.

On 18 July, there were three eggs in the Horned Lark nest. Unfortunately, the sod farm operators had sprayed the field, and the weeds were either dead or wilted. The nest was conspicuous. On 21 July, Johnson observed that the three eggs were still present with the female close by. However, the sod farm operators were preparing to roll the field with a huge roller.

These observations indicate that at least one pair of Horned Larks produced at least one juvenile (22 May), an unknown number of additional young (6 June), four young juveniles (14 July), an unsuccessful nest attempt 20 June and another 4 July. There may have been other unsuccessful attempts, as Beason (1995) noted that they generally renest within two days of nest destruction.

The southward expansion of the breeding range for Horned Larks in the southeastern United States appears to be continuing. Schiefer (pers. comm.) knows of no coastal plain breeding records in eastern Mississippi. However, summer records in south Georgia suggest breeding there. Sewell (1995) reported a record in Decatur County on 15 June 1995. Schneider (pers. comm.) lists three additional records from far south Georgia in late May and early June, but they are all "observed" only without any codes to confirm breeding. Griffin (1951) and Patterson (1991) each commented on the difficulty of locating a Horned Lark nest. One reason is that the parent does not fly directly to the nest to feed its young. Instead, it flies to the general area and then takes a circuitous route a considerable distance through the grass to the hidden nest (Wilson, pers. comm.). Thus, it is likely that Horned Larks are in fact breeding where they have been found in Georgia. In light of the continued southward expansion, birders in south Alabama should be looking for this bird nesting between March and July on bare ground or in fields of short grass or stubble in sod farms, airports and other similar habitat.

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## WINTER POPULATION TRENDS AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE BALD EAGLE (*HALIAEETUS LEUCOCEPHALUS*) ON THE TENNESSEE RIVER, ALABAMA, 1976-1999

Thomas M. Haggerty, Paul D. Kittle, and M. Keith Hudson

### INTRODUCTION

The Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) inhabits aquatic ecosystems such as estuaries, large lakes, reservoirs, major rivers, and some seacoast habitats. It feeds primarily on fish, waterfowl, and carrion. Habitat loss, illegal shooting, and food contamination with DDT and other chemicals, however, caused precipitous declines in Bald Eagle populations throughout much of the conterminous United States during the 19th and much of the 20th century (Johnsgaard 1990, Federal Register 1999). By the 1970's, the Bald Eagle was considered a rare to uncommon winter visitor in the Tennessee Valley, an area where it once bred and was considered common (Imhof 1976). With the ban of DDT, federal protection, and recovery programs, Bald Eagle populations have increased and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service has recently proposed that it be taken off the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife (Federal Register 1999).

Wintering habitats are of the utmost importance for the continued survival of the Bald Eagle. Therefore, studies are needed to identify important wintering sites and document population trends (Federal Register 1999). The objectives of this article are to provide estimates of winter population trends for the Bald Eagle in various regions of the Tennessee River Valley in Alabama between 1976-1999 and to examine the distribution of Bald Eagles wintering along the Tennessee River.

### STUDY AREA AND METHODS

Two methods were used to estimate wintering Bald Eagle populations in the Tennessee River Valley, aerial surveys and Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's). Two aerial survey routes were conducted from a single engine airplane during the first two weeks of January between 1979-1999. The Pickwick Reservoir route was approximately 104 miles long. It started at Wilson Dam (Tennessee River mile [TRM] 259), Colbert/Lauderdale counties, Alabama, and extended along

one riverbank until Pickwick Dam (TRM 207), Hardin County, Tennessee, was reached. The route then continued back to Wilson Dam along the opposite riverbank. The Wheeler-Guntersville route was 132 miles long and extended along one riverbank from Hobbs Island (TRM 337), Madison County, Alabama to TRM 403 near Stevenson, Jackson County, Alabama, along one riverbank and returned to Hobbs Island along the opposite riverbank. Eagles along each riverbank were counted. The plane flew at an altitude of approximately 100 ft (30.5 m) at a speed of 90-110 knots (104-127 mph) during daylight hours. Only rain, snow, or extremely windy conditions prevented surveys.

Data from three National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts were used in our study. These counts involve teams of observers who count birds within a 15-mile diameter circle on a single day during the last three weeks of December or first week of January. The Guntersville CBC is centered near Guntersville, Marshall County, Alabama, and includes Tennessee River miles 348-368. Miles 349-368 are on Guntersville Reservoir, including Town Creek, Big Spring Creek, Browns Creek, and Honeycomb Creek embayments, while mile 348-349 is in the uppermost portion of Wheeler Reservoir, downstream from Guntersville Dam. The Wheeler CBC is centered near Mooresville, Limestone County, Alabama, and includes Tennessee River miles 303-318 of Wheeler Reservoir, including Limestone Creek and Flint Creek embayments, in Limestone, Madison, and Morgan counties. The Waterloo CBC is centered near Lane Springs, Colbert County, Alabama, and covers Tennessee River miles 222-241 of Pickwick Reservoir, including Bear Creek and Second Creek embayments, in Colbert and Lauderdale counties. Data from 1976 through 1998 were available for the Guntersville and Wheeler counts, while the Waterloo count has been conducted only from 1985 through 1998. The Waterloo and Wheeler counts were conducted on the same day during the second or third week in December, while the Guntersville count was conducted, on average, one week later.

Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between eagle counts and year. A t-test and analysis of variance were used to compare count data between the two aerial survey routes and among the three CBC's, respectively. The Duncan multiple range test was used to compare means. Probability values less than 0.05 were considered significant.

## RESULTS

*Aerial Surveys.*- The average number of Bald Eagles counted by aerial survey per year was 53.8. Variation, however, was found among years (e.g., minimum



= 17 in 1979, maximum = 155 in 1994, standard deviation [SD] = 31,  $n = 21$ ). Overall, aerial surveys indicate that eagle numbers during the survey period significantly increased ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ,  $n = 21$ ; Fig. 1A). However, when the routes were examined separately, only the Pickwick route showed a significant increase in eagles (Pickwick route:  $r = 0.63$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ,  $n = 21$ ; Wheeler-Guntersville route:  $r = 0.32$ ,  $P > 0.15$ ;  $n = 21$ , Fig. 1A). Further, the overall significant increase was also primarily due to an increase that occurred during the first half of the survey period (i.e., 1979-1989;  $r = 0.80$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ,  $n = 11$ , Fig. 1A). No significant increase was found during the second half of the survey period (i.e., 1990-1999;  $r = 0.25$ ,  $P > 0.5$ ,  $n = 10$ , Fig. 1A).

A comparison between the two aerial survey routes showed that more eagles wintered along the Pickwick route than along the Wheeler-Guntersville route ( $t = 3.7$ ,  $P < 0.01$ , Fig. 1A). On average,  $35.4 \pm 27$  (SD) eagles were counted along the Pickwick route and  $18.4 \pm 8.0$  were counted on the Wheeler-Guntersville route.

*Christmas Bird Counts.* - The CBC data showed a significant decrease in wintering eagle numbers in the count circles between 1985-1998 ( $r = -0.58$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ,  $n = 14$ ; Fig. 1B). However, when the results of the three counts were examined separately, only the Waterloo CBC showed a significant decrease ( $r = -0.70$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ,  $n = 14$ ; Fig. 1B). Comparison of the Bald Eagle counts among the CBC's of the three reservoirs were significantly different ( $F = 44.7$ ,  $P < 0.0001$ , Fig. 1B). The Waterloo CBC had the highest average count (6.8/10 party-hrs) and the Wheeler CBC the lowest (0.4/10 party-hrs).

## DISCUSSION

Our results show that the Tennessee River in Alabama is an important wintering site for the Bald Eagle. The aerial surveys indicate that the number of eagles wintering along the Tennessee River has increased in the last 21 years. Interestingly, the CBC results do not show a similar trend. A number of factors may explain this inconsistency. First, the aerial survey data were collected for six years prior to the start of Waterloo CBC, the only count that showed a significant change. If only the aerial survey data between 1985-1998 (i.e., the years that the Waterloo CBC was conducted) are analyzed, no significant correlation is found ( $r = 0.32$ ,  $P > 0.2$ ,  $n = 15$ ). This indicates that it was primarily an increase during the early 1980's that was responsible for the significant correlation that was shown for the entire survey period. Secondly,

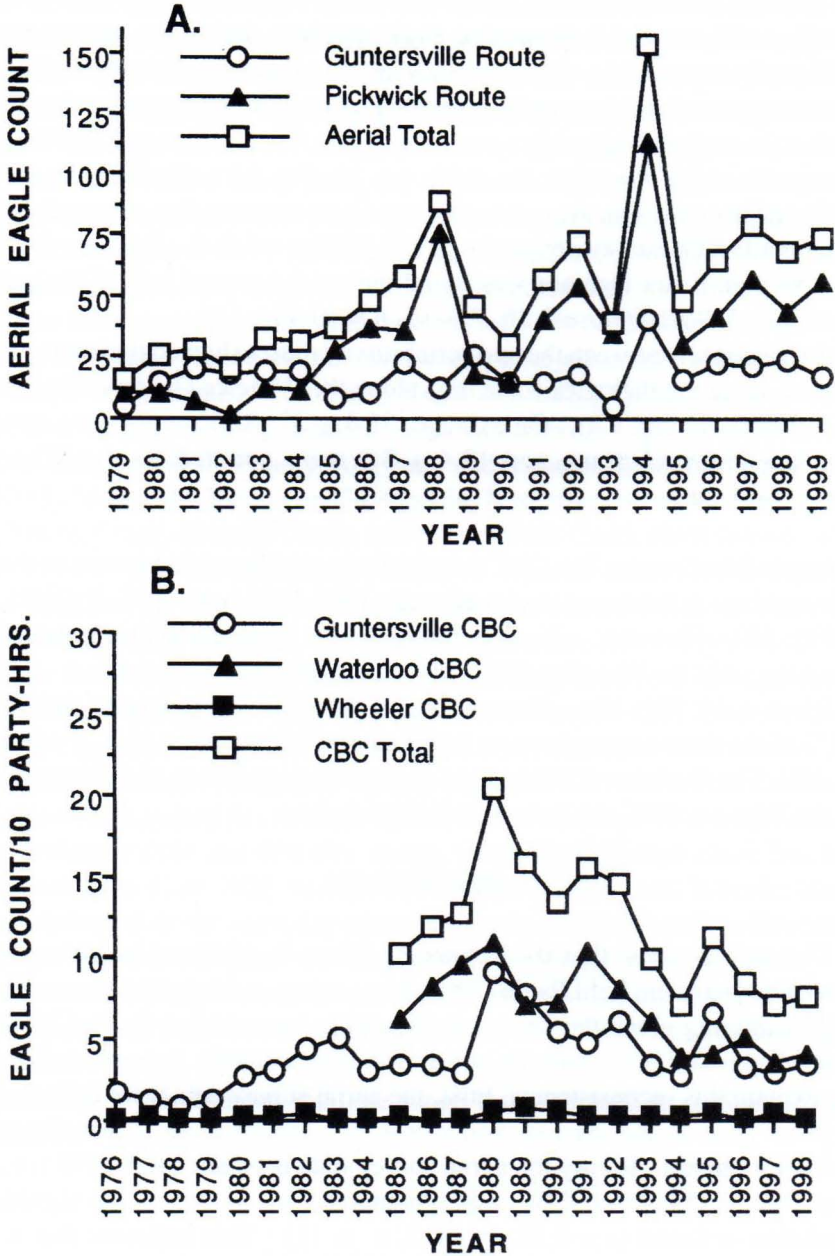


Figure 1. Bald Eagle counts from yearly aerial surveys (A) and Christmas Bird Counts (B) along the Tennessee River, Alabama.

temperature may also have affected the count results. Aerial survey counts were usually conducted after the CBC's. Typically, weeks in late December and early January have colder temperatures than the first weeks of December. Colder temperatures may have reduced open water for feeding at sites farther north and could have forced eagles southward into the Tennessee Valley after the CBC's had been conducted. We suspect that temperature variation also accounts for some of the variation in eagle numbers that was seen among years. Interestingly, the number of eagles wintering in the Tennessee Valley appears to have peaked in the early 1990's. It is unclear if this is due to weather conditions that may have allowed eagles to winter farther north or because the maximum number of eagles that the river can support during the winter has been reached. It may also indicate that the breeding populations with individuals that winter in the Tennessee River have leveled off.

Our results indicate that Bald Eagles are not equally dispersed along the Tennessee River, Alabama. The highest aerial survey counts and CBC's were made on Pickwick Reservoir and its tributaries, with lower counts on Guntersville Reservoir and Wheeler Reservoir. It is unclear what factors account for the winter dispersal pattern that we observed, but variation in food resources (Johnsgaard 1990), roost and perch sites (Johnsgaard 1990), levels of human disturbance (McGarigal *et al.* 1991), and river flow rates (Brown *et al.* 1998) may have been responsible. If the Tennessee Valley is to remain an important wintering site for the Bald Eagle, monitoring studies should continue and additional research is needed to identify the factors responsible for the variation in Bald Eagle distribution along the Tennessee River in Alabama.

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## SIGHTINGS: SPRING AND SUMMER 1999

Greg D. Jackson

Spring and Summer 1999 offered mixed blessings for birders in the AOS area, depending on when and where one happened to be in the field. Those lucky enough to be at the coast for the AOS meeting enjoyed a diversity of birds not seen in years; this was especially true for warblers, with 34 species recorded 16-18 April following a strong front. Less fortunate souls, working the coast at different dates, might have regarded the spring as dull. Inland, birding was good in early May for passerines, but less favorable for shorebirds. As usual, several rarities peppered the field to keep things lively. After the transients departed, the most significant news was the continued steady increase in breeding (or probable breeding) for Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Lark Sparrow inland, and the first nesting of Horned Lark in the coastal plain.

March was generally cooler than normal across the state, and rainfall was increased on the coast and normal elsewhere. April was warmer and drier than usual, and May was about average in both categories. Normal temperatures and increased rainfall were experienced in June. In most of the state, July was warm and dry, though it was slightly cooler than usual on the coast.

This report covers the period from March through July 1999 in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle (east to the Apalachicola River). The appearance of observations in this column does not suggest verification or acceptance of records for very rare species; these must be considered by the appropriate state records committees. All submissions of birds that are rare, either in general or for a particular season or region, must be accompanied by adequate details of the observation. The extent of this documentation depends on the rarity of the species and the difficulty of identification. For guidance, observers are encouraged to consult the recently-revised AOS checklist. Reports should note the conditions of observation and the diagnostic characters observed. Your help in this matter is appreciated.

**Abbreviations and Italics:** County names are in italics. "GC" = Gulf Coast (Alabama); "ICP" = Inland Coastal Plain (Alabama); "MR" = Mountain Region; "TV" = Tennessee Valley; "WP" = Western Panhandle of Florida (Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa Counties). Locations not specifying Florida are in Alabama. "AFB" = Air Force Base; "b." = banded; "*et al.*" = and others (small number); "m.ob." = many observers; "NF" = National Forest; "NWR" = National

Wildlife Refuge; "p.a." = pending acceptance by the state bird records committee; "ph." = photographed; "SP" = State Park; "v." = videotaped. Other abbreviations in parentheses correspond to observers listed at the end of this article.

## LOONS – DUCKS

Red-throated Loon is now expected annually at Guntersville, *Marshall*, where one was spotted 8 April (LBR, RAR). Two or more **Pacific Loons** were rare treats in the Pensacola, FL, area this spring; singles were at Ft. Pickens, *Escambia*, 12-22 March (RAD, PCT), and near Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, beginning 29 April and continuing very late to 1 June (RAD, LRD, AF). Unusual in summer, especially in the MR, a Common Loon was at Oak Mountain SP, *Shelby*, 8 June (PR). Breeding Pied-billed Grebes are scarce, so adults with young 9 May in *Montgomery* (LFG) and 30 July in *Limestone* (DRC, RC) were noteworthy. An alternate-plumaged Horned Grebe 16-25 June at Ft. Walton Beach, *Okaloosa* (HK, DMW) provided only the second June record for the WP. Lone Eared Grebes were at separate sites in *Marshall* 4 March and 24 March - 8 April (RAR, LBR); this species is a sparse visitor inland. More expected were coastal birds 25-31 March at Dauphin I., *Mobile* (GEH, m.ob.), and 15-17 April at Bayou La Batre, *Mobile* (SWM *et al.*).

Anhinga is uncommon and localized in the southern part of our area, but two birds 4 May in *Marshall* (LBR, RAR) were exceptional. A Snowy Egret at Guntersville 7 May (LBR, RAR) was unusual, and eight were plentiful as early as 27 June in *Lowndes* (LFG *et al.*). After an extraordinary season in 1998, Wood Stork numbers returned to more normal levels this summer, with a high of 46 in *Hale* 10 July (SWM).

Snow Geese lingered to 4 May in *Montgomery* (CTS); one bird 9 May in Gadsden, *Etowah* (P&KW) set a late MR record. A rare Ross's Goose was in Fairhope, *Baldwin*, 12 April-1 May (MFF, m.ob., v.), establishing the latest departure for the state and only the fourth occurrence for the GC. The pair of Blue-winged Teal at Guntersville 31 May (B&WB) was either tardy or represented rare summering birds; even more unusual was the pair of N. Shovelers seen with the teal. Excluding scarce breeding records, the 25 Blue-winged Teal in *Hale* 21 July (GDJ) were the earliest for s. Alabama. Furnishing a second June WP record, a N. Shoveler was spotted 23 June at Pensacola, *Escambia* (AF).

A late Greater Scaup was at Bayou La Batre 16-17 April (SWM *et al.*). Twelve White-winged Scoters were notable 2 March at Ft. Pickens, FL (RAD, LRD); more significant was the individual 2 April at Guntersville (RAR),

establishing a late record for the state. Single tarrying Red-breasted Mergansers were seen 15 May in *Montgomery* (LFG), marking a new departure date for the ICP, and 31 May in Guntersville (B&WB). Finishing the parade of lingering waterfowl, a Ruddy Duck was at Ft. Walton Beach, FL, 16-25 June (HK, DMW).

## RAPTORS - TERNS

Only the fifth for the WP, a **White-tailed Kite** was a surprise 2 March in Blackwater River State Forest, *Santa Rosa* (GB). Four Mississippi Kites were extremely early 13 March at Eglin AFB, *Okaloosa*, FL (DMW); another was locally rare 12 May in Lake Guntersville SP (LBR). Always an exciting find, the elusive Black Rail was spotted 17 April at Dauphin I. (GJH). Up to four King Rails were n. Alabama rarities 1-7 May in *Lauderdale* (JTG, TMH, SWM); three were very rare during the breeding season 27 June at Blackwater River Delta, *Santa Rosa*, FL (LRD, PCT). Representing a second June WP sighting, a Sora was noted 9 June at Ft. Walton Beach (HK).

Marking a new TV departure date, an alternate-plumaged Black-bellied Plover was discovered 11 June near Florence, *Lauderdale* (PDK). Another Black-bellied 6 and 12 July on Little Dauphin I., *Mobile* (KK) likely was a scarce summering bird. Huge numbers of Am. Golden-Plovers appeared in *Lowndes* this spring, with a peak of 237 establishing an Alabama maximum 20-21 March (SER, LFG *et al.*). A count of 102 golden-plovers 16 March at Ft. Walton Beach, FL (PCT, m.ob.) was noteworthy. Three Semipalmated Plovers and one Piping Plover at Little Dauphin I. 12 July (KK) probably were early migrants, with the latter setting a new early date for the state. The Am. Oystercatcher at Gulf Breeze 5 April (RAD) was only the 11th recorded for the WP; one at Navarre, *Santa Rosa*, 15 June (RR) gave the WP a first for June.

Scarce in the WP, 25 Am. Avocets were at Ft. Pickens 22 April (RAD, CD), and a dozen appeared at Pensacola 11 May (AF, DF); two avocets 20 July at Blakeley I., *Mobile* (LFG) represented either early arrivals or rare summering birds. A gathering of 35 Lesser Yellowlegs, 150 Least Sandpipers, 25 Pectoral Sandpipers, and nine Short-billed Dowitchers was unusual as early as 17 July in *Lowndes* (CTS, PS); the Pectorals set a new arrival date for the ICP. Rare inland, but especially at Guntersville, were two Willets 26 April (RAR). Three Marbled Godwits were noteworthy 22 April at Pensacola, FL (AF, DF). Tying an early state record, a White-rumped Sandpiper was spotted 16 April at Bayou La Batre (SWM, m.ob.). Other early shorebirds included a Stilt Sandpiper 20 July at Blakeley I. (LFG), and single Wilson's Phalaropes 1 April at Ft. Walton Beach, FL (PCT, m.ob.) and 16-17 April at Bayou La Batre (SWM, m.ob.). The first-

year **Black-legged Kittiwake** at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin* 14 April was a great find, and only the 12th for Alabama (PCT, m.ob., p.a.). Locally rare was a Least Tern 31 May at Guntersville (B&WB).

## OWLS - SWALLOWS

The longstanding Burrowing Owl colony at Eglin AFB, FL, was surveyed 31 July, with 15 individuals found, including six juveniles and two breeding pairs (PB, LF). A Short-eared Owl, erratic in our area, remained to 17 March at Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale* (PDK, DEK, DJS). Earliest for inland Alabama, a Whip-poor-will was heard 5 March in Talladega NF, *Cleburne* (BS).

Rarely seen in spring, the Olive-sided Flycatcher in *Jackson* 20 May (GDJ, DGJ) established a new departure date for the state. Early, and only the seventh in spring for the GC, a calling Least Flycatcher was documented 17 April at Dauphin I. (LFG, SER). Five E. Phoebes in n.e. *Autauga* 22 May (SER) represented a good number in the breeding season south of the Fall Line. A male Vermilion Flycatcher was a fine surprise in *Monroe* 16 April (C&JS, ph.); the occurrence established the latest of nine inland records of this western stray. For a fifth WP record of the species complex, a silent **Tropical/Couch's Kingbird** appeared 14 June at Gulf Breeze (RAD, p.a.); strangely, *three* were seen last summer at this spot. Western Kingbirds are scarce in spring, even on the outer coast; one was at Ft. Morgan 6 April (LRD, m.ob.), and a late bird was at Gulf Breeze 10 May (RAD).

A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 9 March at Dauphin I. (PRb) was unusual at that early date. Breeding and summering Scissor-taileds are gradually increasing inland in Alabama, particularly in the TV and ICP. This May and June we had seven reports of pairs or single birds. In the TV, these included two sites in *Morgan* (SWM, HHK, CDC *et al.*) and four spots in *Madison* (KW, DRC, RC, JM). Lone Scissor-taileds were unusual 13 June in *Blount* (DB) and *Lee* (BB). Rare-but-regular in spring on the outer coast, three Black-whiskered Vireos were at Ft. Morgan 3-18 April (RRS, m.ob., two b.); singles were noted in Florida 28 April at Ft. Pickens (MR, HH) and the next day at Gulf Breeze (RAD). Unusually late was a Black-whiskered 1-2 June at Gulf Breeze (RAD, LRD).

Horned Lark is rare at any time in the southern portion of our territory, so at least eight birds in *Lowndes* this spring and summer were a surprise (TAP, LFG, CTS, m.ob., ph.). More amazing was the documented nesting by several larks, producing young, the first breeding known for the ICP. A Tree Swallow 10 June on the Tennessee R. in *Limestone* (JTG) was very unusual; the species breeds only casually in n. Alabama. A single concentration of 300 N. Rough-winged



Swallows at Demopolis, *Marengo*, was unusual as early as 4 July (SER). Also ahead of schedule was a Bank Swallow 20 July at Blakeley I. (LFG). Setting new early records for the WP, single Cliff and Barn swallows were sighted 3 March at Ft. Walton Beach (PCT, m.ob.). Cliff Swallow appears to be continuing the southward expansion of the inland population, with two new breeding sites discovered this summer. A colony of 20 birds was at Alexander City, *Tallapoosa*, 12 June (SER), and at least eight were nesting in Demopolis 4 July (SER); the latter site represents the southernmost inland extension known in the state.

## WRENS - FINCHES

Rarely reported in spring in the TV, a Sedge Wren was present 1-7 May in *Lauderdale* (JTG, TMH, SWM). The Ruby-crowned Kinglet 15 May in *Montgomery* (CTS, PS) set a new late date for Alabama; also late was a Swainson's Thrush 20 May in *Marshall* (GDJ). American Robin is a rare nesting species in the WP, so 10-20 birds in n. Pensacola in May were unusual; nesting was confirmed 10 May (DT, PCT). Uncommon as a breeder in the ICP, three Gray Catbirds were found in s.e. *Autauga* and *Elmore* 16-23 May (SER). Cedar Waxwing breeds sparingly in n. Alabama; this June birds were found in three locations in *Limestone* and *Morgan*, with feeding of dependent young observed at one site (all CDC).

Rare in spring, a Nashville Warbler was at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 2 May (GDJ). Cape May Warbler is regular in spring in most of the state, but ICP records are scarce; single birds were in *Montgomery* 7 April (CTS, PS) and 1-2 May (LFG), the former setting a new early date. Also ahead of the pack was a Blackburnian Warbler 7 April in *Montgomery* (CTS, PS); five noted at Monte Sano SP 2 May (GDJ, DGJ) represented a good single-site count for spring.

An organized effort was made this year to detect nesting Cerulean Warblers. Formerly a locally uncommon breeder in north and central Alabama, recent nesting season records outside the Bankhead NF, particularly the Sipsey Wilderness Area, have been scarce. Despite use of taped songs, only one site was found outside the Bankhead; a territorial pair was located 24 May along Rock Creek, s.w. *Colbert* (TMH, MA, PDK, DJS), at a site where a singing male had been noted in June 1997 (TMH). Though not all possible sites were checked this year, the perception of a marked decrease in the species as a breeder here seems to have been correct. The only bright spot was the detection of moderate numbers of Ceruleans in the Sipsey Wilderness Area stronghold (ES).

Swainson's Warbler is difficult to find in the TV, so the returning bird 19 April-17 May at Wheeler NWR, *Morgan* (CDC) was notable. Two rare Mourning

Warblers were heard, one in *Jefferson* 16 May (PR) and another in *Morgan* 18 May (HHK, MD, PK).

Analogous to the increase in Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Lark Sparrow is becoming more prominent as a breeder in the TV and ICP. This season showed birds returning to two locations in *Lawrence* (SWM, HHK *et al.*); at least five new sites were discovered in *Morgan* (MSG, CDC, m.ob.), *Madison* (DRC, RC), and *Lawrence* (SWM). A juvenile Lark Sparrow 21 July near Marion, *Perry* (GDJ, DGJ) could have originated locally. The Seaside Sparrow 7 July at Gulf Breeze (RAD) must have been a bizarre sight in a coastal woods. Lincoln's Sparrow is rare in spring on the coast, and the bird 7 April at Ft. Morgan (RRS *et al.*) was either an early migrant or a wintering bird. It was a stunning spring for Painted Bunting, with 131 of these jewels banded at Ft. Morgan 3-18 April (RRS *et al.*). On 16 April alone, 59 Painteds were banded at Fort Morgan; combined with a minimum of 21 birds on Dauphin I. (GDJ, DGJ, m.ob.), at least 80 were recorded that day, setting a new Alabama maximum.

Continuing a trend in the last few years of minimal visitation along the coast, two Shiny Cowbirds were reported, both from the WP; one was at Ft. Pickens, 14 May (RAD), and another appeared at Gulf Breeze on the unusual date of 8 July (RAD). Baltimore Oriole winters only rarely in our region, so one from mid-February to 2 April in Guntersville (RAR, LBR) was a surprise. Extremely unusual was the **Bullock's Oriole** 24 April at Clay, *Jefferson* (RRS, MBS, p.a.), furnishing the latest inland record and tying the state departure record. Bill Summerour devoted considerable time and effort over the last year documenting the first known nesting of Red Crossbill in Alabama. Eight nests were discovered from winter into early summer in *Cleburne*; details will be published separately.

**Cited Observers (area compilers in boldface):** Moez Ali, Barbara Ballantine, Gray Bass, Pam Bowen, Bobby & Wally Brown, Duane Brown, C. Dwight Cooley, Dean R. Cutten, Raelene Cutten, Martha Dagg, Chris Depkin, Lucy R. Duncan, **Robert A. Duncan (Florida)**, Lenny Fenimore, Mary F. Floyd, Ann Forster, Dan Forster, Larry F. Gardella, Jeff T. Garner, M. Scott Gravette, Tom M. Haggerty, Greg J. Harber, Geoff E. Hill, Hud Huddleston, Debra G. Jackson, **Greg D. Jackson (Alabama)**, Keith Kimmerle, Helene King, Peggy King, Helen H. Kittinger, Donna E. Kittle, Paul D. Kittle, John McBride, Steve W. McConnell, Tommy A. Pratt, Shawn E. Reed, Linda B. Reynolds, Richard A. Reynolds, Paul Rodelaub (PRb), Marilu Rose, Rufus Rose, Pelham Rowan,

Martha B. Sargent, Robert R. Sargent, Damien J. Simbeck, Carolyn T. Snow, Phil Snow, Eric Soehren, Claire & Jim Stallworth, Bill Summerour, Phil C. Tetlow, Dana Timmons, Ken Ward, Donald M. Ware, Phillip & Karen White.

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### ERRATUM

The following error should be corrected in the papers "Observations of nesting Eurasian Collard-Doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*) in Gulf Breeze, Florida" and "Summer Sightings (June-July, 1998)" published in *Alabama Birdlife* 45, No. 2. Gulf Breeze is in Santa Rosa County, not Escambia County.

**IN MEMORIAM**  
**Thomas Z. Atkeson, Jr.**  
**1912 - 1999**



An illustrious career in conservation, ornithology and wildlife management came to a close with the passing of Tom Atkeson of Columbia, Alabama, on 12 July. Tom's career was centered at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge near Decatur, where he served as Refuge Manager for 25 years, from 1962 until his retirement in 1987. He began his career there in 1939 when Wheeler Refuge was just getting organized and, after service during World War II with the Army's 5th Armored Tank Group, became Wildlife Management Biologist before becoming Refuge Manager. He had an uncanny ability to recall every location on the over 34,000 acres of the refuge and could describe, after many years, just what wildlife should be expected at every place. This was evidence of his superior intellect, which he used so well in managing that refuge.

Wheeler is the largest wildlife refuge in Alabama and one of the largest in the Southeast. During Tom's management, he developed it into a wintering refuge for thousands of ducks and geese and a refuge throughout the year for many species of birds, mammals and other wildlife. During his administration, he developed many facilities for environmental education, including a wildlife

interpretive center with museum, waterfowl observation pond, a program of wildlife films and other activities, nature trails, observation towers, boardwalks, picnic areas and public fishing facilities. Under his administration, Wheeler Refuge was also instrumental in preserving significant wetland and other habitats, in particular the Beaverdam Creek Tupelo Swamp that has been designated as a National Natural Landmark and is representative of the very important southern bottomland hardwood forests that are greatly in need of preservation.

Tom, during his many years of service, was recognized for his contributions to the wildlife refuge system and conservation. He received the Interior Department's Meritorious Achievement Award (1949), the American Motors Conservation Award (1960), the Special Act Award from the Fish and Wildlife Service for co-authoring the publication "Farming for Waterfowl" (1963), the Alabama Wildlife Federation Conservationist of the Year Award (1964), the Fish and Wildlife Service Achievement Award for Superior Service (1984 and 1986), and an award as Outstanding Federal Employee from the President of the United States (1983).

Tom authored and co-authored many bulletins on wildlife management, wrote a weekly "out-of-doors" column that was used by 14 newspapers and on local radio and television stations, and wrote numerous articles that appeared in a wide variety of state and national publications. He served as Vice-President of the Alabama Ornithological Society, and some of his articles were in its scientific journal, *Alabama Birdlife*.

Tom always took a prime interest in collecting data on all types of birdlife in the refuge and was instrumental in organizing the Wheeler Refuge Annual Christmas Bird Count that continues today. He rendered wise counsel on many conservation issues, including the necessity for preserving refuge lands, the adverse effects of stream channelization, and the need for higher water quality. The City of Birmingham and Birmingham Audubon Society recognized him for his many contributions and accomplishments by a Citation in 1983. At his retirement ceremony in 1987, those contributions and accomplishments were further recognized by the Morgan County Commission, the City of Decatur, the Decatur Chamber of Commerce, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alabama's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Tennessee Valley Audubon Society.

Tom Atkeson preferred not to dwell on his many achievements, but did say he appreciated the awards from his local friends most of all. He preferred, instead, to think of Rudyard Kipling's words about Tommy Atkins in his "Barrack-Room Ballad":

"I ain't no thin red hero,  
I ain't no blackguard too,  
But an ordinary human  
Most remarkably like you."

Tom's was a life well-lived and one which few can duplicate in his remarkable devotion to service, our natural world and the environment that he recognized we need to be more diligent in preserving. The Alabama Ornithological Society and the Birmingham Audubon Society, as well as many other organizations, extend our deepest sympathy to his daughter Mary, his son Tom, and all his family.

## 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, identification or other related topics. Refer to this issue or to recent past issues for examples. *Alabama Birdlife* is published twice a year. 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 a hard copy (Word or WordPerfect preferred). A manuscript may also be submitted over the Internet as a file attached to an e-mail addressed to: thaggert@unanov.una.edu.

Manuscripts should be typed and double spaced. A 8 1/2 x 11 inch page format should be used.

Digital images submitted over the Internet, black and white prints, 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.

Table titles should be in CAPS and placed above the tables.

Figure legends should be in lower case and placed beneath the figure.

Refer to the Literature Cited in past issues for the correct format.

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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