

WINTER SIGHTINGS (DECEMBER 2000 – FEBRUARY 2001)

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This report covers the period from December 2000 through February 2001 in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle (west of the Apalachicola River). The appearance of observations in this article 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 Alabama Ornithological Society checklist. Reports should note conditions of observation and the diagnostic characters observed. Your help in this matter is appreciated.

Abbreviations and Italics: County names are in italics and, except for the Florida counties of *Escambia*, *Okaloosa*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Walton*, are in Alabama. “@” = subject to review by appropriate records committee; “ABRC” = Alabama Bird Records Committee; “CBC” = Christmas Bird Count; “FOSRC” = Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee; “FWBSF” = Ft. Walton Beach Sewerage Facility; “m.ob.” = many observers; “NWR” = National Wildlife Refuge; “ph.” = photographed; “WP” = Western Panhandle of Florida (*Escambia*, *Okaloosa*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Walton* counties); “WTF” = Woerner Turf Farm.

RED-THROATED LOON – This is an expected but rare species on the coast during most years. Three individuals on 19 February at Fairhope, *Baldwin*, represented a good number (Bill Summerour). Another individual was on Pensacola Bay at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 27 January-12 February (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Ed Case, Alan Knothe, m.ob.). Two more individuals were reported from Destin, *Okaloosa*, 11 February (David Simpson and Murray Gardler).

PACIFIC LOON –Singles were seen by Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten, and m.ob. on 24 December at Guntersville, *Marshall*, and by Steve McConnell on 31 December at Perdido Pass, *Baldwin*, sites where this species is rare but regular.

RED-NECKED GREBE – While not on the official Florida list due to lack of

photograph or a specimen, there are over 40 reports. Three were reported this season from the WP. A first winter bird was seen 13-19 December at Gulf Breeze, Santa Rosa Sound, *Santa Rosa*, by Bob Duncan, Ed Case, Lois Case, as well as some 50 additional observers (@FOSRC; ph. by Lois Case), for a fifth area record. A different individual was seen on Pensacola Bay at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, by Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Jan Lloyd, Alan Knothe, Jesse Knothe, m.ob. (@FOSRC), from 28 January-16 February. Also, an adult on 28 February at Destin Pass, *Okaloosa* (Alan Knothe).

EARED GREBE – This species is expected but uncommon on Mobile Bay in winter, so the 15 seen by Larry Gardella on 13 January at Mullet Point, *Baldwin*, was a good number.

BROWN BOOBY – Bob Reid reported three from Perdido Pass, *Baldwin*, on 30 December. Brown Booby is occasional in Alabama, casual in winter.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON – Casual in December in the WP, an adult was observed at Pensacola, *Escambia*, on 1 December (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Alan Sheppard).

TURKEY VULTURE – On the Waterloo CBC (*Colbert/Lauderdale*), the 110 recorded on 16 December represented a maximum for the Tennessee Valley Region. Most were seen at a single roost. Another maximum was set for the Gulf Coast on the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin*, where 160 were recorded on 30 December.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE – An unusual number of sightings came from scattered locations in Alabama and the WP. A single bird representing the 20th local record was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, on 11 December (Don Ware, Bob Duncan, Ed Case, m.ob.). By 7 January there were nine birds that remained until 18 January. One bird first located in *Santa Rosa* on 16 December continued to 28 February (Bill Bremser, Greta Bremser, Becky McQueen, Rick Blom, Bryan Blasie). Three were located by Ned Piper and Walt Burch on the Waterloo CBC, *Colbert*, 16 December (rare in northwest Alabama). This species is also rare in winter on the Gulf Coast, but seven were seen on the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin*, on 30 December (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Bill Summerour, Howard Horne *et al.*), and a single was on the Mobile Causeway, *Mobile*, on 2 January (Bill Summerour, Linda Reynolds). This species is uncommon at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, so the 22 reported by Eric Soehren on 15 January represented a good number.

SNOW GOOSE – On the Waterloo CBC, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, on 16 December, 84 was a good number for northwest Alabama.

ROSS'S GOOSE – This species is rare but expected at Wheeler NWR, Alabama. Phil Tetlow and Betsy Tetlow had two at the refuge observation building, *Morgan*, on 22 December, while Sue Moske reported one from Limestone Bay, *Limestone*, on 3 January. Two additional records came from farther south. At the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, a single represented the fourth area record (@ FOSRC); seen on 20 December by David Simpson and on 7 January by Bob Duncan and Ed Case. Bob Duncan and Lucy Duncan had one on the Gulf Shores CBC at Bon Secour, *Baldwin*, on 30 December (rare on Gulf Coast).

BLUE-WINGED TEAL – Damien Simbeck reported one from Donnegon Slough, *Colbert*, on 5 January. This species is rare in winter in north Alabama.

SURF SCOTER – Very rare inland in winter, especially in the Mountain Region, a single lingered at Fayette, *Fayette*, from 21 December-12 January (D. Dobbs *et al.*; ph.). Locally rare, Don Ware reported 20 on 5 January from *Walton*.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER – This bay duck is expected but rare on the Gulf Coast. Larry Gardella had a single at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin*, on 13 January.

BLACK SCOTER – Another bay duck that is expected but rare on the Gulf Coast, a single was reported from Coden, *Mobile*, on the Dauphin Island CBC on 23 December (Bill Summerour).

LONG-TAILED DUCK – This species is rare anywhere in our area. It was reported from the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 11 December-22 January (Don Ware). Bill Summerour had two at Fairhope, *Baldwin*, on 13 January and 20 February. Dick Reynolds and Linda Reynolds had a single female at Guntersville, *Marshall*, on 15 January.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER – On the Waterloo CBC, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, on 16 December, the total of 113 was a good winter number for northwest Alabama.

RUDDY DUCK – Steve McConnell established a new maximum for Alabama with his count of 1,084 at Guntersville, *Marshall*, on 18 February.

OSPREY – Rare in winter in north Alabama, a single was seen at Upper Bear Creek Reservoir, *Marion*, on 10 January (Damien Simbeck).

BALD EAGLE – An aerial survey of Pickwick and Guntersville reservoirs in north Alabama (*Colbert/Lauderdale/Marshall*) on 9 January produced a good number of 75 (Keith Hudson, R. Stroud). Locally rare, an adult was recorded south of Montgomery, *Montgomery*, on 11 August by Fred Bassett and Jayne Rushin. Three adults, including two at a previous nest site, were seen at Heiberger, *Perry*, on 15 January (Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton).

GOLDEN EAGLE – Rare and irregular anywhere in Alabama, this species was reported from two localities this winter. Tom Brindley and m.ob. reported two-three below Guntersville Dam, *Marshall*, between 6-26 January, and a report of a single came from Willow Springs, *Montgomery* (fide T. Oliver; ph.), on 10 December.

CRESTED CARACARA – A potential first record for Alabama (@ ABRC), one was videotaped in southern *Baldwin* on 19 February (David Plumb). See article in this issue.

MERLIN – Three reports of this falcon, rare in winter for inland Alabama, were received. Steve McConnell had one at the WTF, *Lowndes*, on 9 February, and another at Speigner, *Elmore*, on 23 February. The third report of a single came from Wheeler NWR, *Limestone*, on 7 January (Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten).

PEREGRINE FALCON – A second falcon that is rare in winter for inland Alabama, Tommy Pratt and Shawn Reed had one at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, on 22 December, and Larry Gardella had one at Speigner, *Elmore*, on 25 February.

PRAIRIE FALCON – The third Alabama record (@ ABRC) came from below Guntersville Dam, *Marshall*, where one was observed 6-20 January (Tom Brindley, m.ob.).

SANDHILL CRANE – Reflecting the overall increase of this species in the East, reports came from several scattered localities. Bob Reid reported the species from *Walton* on 10 December, while Patrick Gault reported 25 birds from the same county on 7 January, an all-time maximum in the area. David Chaffin reported two from Stevenson, *Jackson*, on 10 December; not often reported from this site, though it may be regular because it is in the main flight path of eastern migrants. A single was seen at Smithsonia, *Lauderdale*, on 16 December by Bill Rogers and Larry Derrick (locally rare). A new maximum for Alabama was set at Limestone Bay, Wheeler NWR, *Limestone*, where 160 were reported on 28 December (Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten). This flock was observed by many observers throughout the period. Robert Reed and Pat Reed saw four birds near Tallassee, *Lee*, on 31 December and 3 February (locally rare).

SNOWY PLOVER – Uncommon in the WP, three reports of this species were received: 10 on 9 December at Navarre Flats, *Santa Rosa* (Peggy Baker, m.ob.), seven on 23 December at Big Lagoon, *Escambia* (Bill Bremser), and a good total of 34 on 7 February at Santa Rosa Island, *Santa Rosa* (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Ed Case).

- AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** – At the mouth of Bayou Grande, Pensacola, *Escambia*, one bird was present from 14-23 December, 16 were seen by 26 December, and a few were still present as of 15 February, for the first December and January records as well an all-time maximum for the area (Ann Forster, Dan Forster).
- SPOTTED SANDPIPER** – Rare in winter on the Inland Coast Plain, one was recorded from Hope Hull, *Montgomery*, on 30 December (Larry Gardella).
- SANDERLING** – Only the second winter inland record for Alabama, one was seen at Swan Creek WMA, *Limestone*, on 4 February (Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten).
- DOWITCHER SP.** – Eight in basic plumage, probably Long-billed, were rare for the Tennessee Valley in winter at Swan Creek WMA, *Limestone*, on 16 December (Greg Jackson).
- JAEGER SP.** – Two individuals from separate sites on the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin*, were reported on 30 December (Dwight Cooley, Steve McConnell, Don Ware).
- LAUGHING GULL** – This species is rare but regular inland. One adult was reported from Wilson Dam, *Lauderdale*, on 21 December (Tom Haggerty). The five adults in basic plumage seen at Guntersville, *Marshall*, on 19 January, set a maximum number for winter in north Alabama (Dick Reynolds, Steve McConnell, m.ob.).
- FRANKLIN'S GULL** – One record came from Florence, *Lauderdale*, on 9 December (Tom Haggerty). A first winter bird, first reported in November, continued at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, from 5-15 December (Bob Duncan, Don Ware, m.ob.).
- LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** – Rare but regular in the Tennessee Valley and apparently slowly increasing, one adult was reported from Guntersville, *Marshall*, on 12 January (Dick Reynolds, L. West, Steve McConnell *et al.*; ph.), and a first year bird was seen at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, on 1 February (Damien Simbeck).
- GLAUCOUS GULL** – Rare in Alabama, one immature was at Guntersville, *Marshall*, on 19 January (Dick Reynolds, m.ob.; ph.).
- GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** – This species is rare in the WP, and Bob Duncan observed a first winter bird at Ft. Pickens, *Escambia*, on 3 February, for the first local record in five years.
- BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** – Shawn Reed reported one on 17 February from Gulf Shores, *Baldwin*, for the 14th Alabama record (@ ABRC).
- EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** – This species continues to fill in its range,

as evidenced by the report of one from Winfield, *Marion*, on 6 February (Jud Johnston).

WHITE-WINGED DOVE – An uncommon-rare species in our area that is being seen with increasing frequency along the Gulf Coast. Flocks of 16 were seen at both Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, on 10 December (Bob Duncan) and in *Okaloosa* on 18 December (Alan Knothe *et al.*). On 30 December, the Gulf Shores CBC in *Baldwin* had a good total of 18.

HUMMINGBIRDS – Astonishing numbers of wintering hummingbirds were banded by Fred Bassett and Bob Sargent of the Hummer Bird Study Group from December–February in the WP, including 30 Rufous, 12 Black-chinned, 11 Ruby-throated, two Calliope, one Buff-bellied, and one Broad-tailed (*vide* Bob Duncan).

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD – One adult female was banded and photographed at Mobile, *Mobile*, on 27 December for the 11th Alabama record (Fred Bassett, J. Hartley; @ ABRC).

CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD – Individuals of this species, unknown in the WP until 1989, were banded by Fred Bassett on 13 and 30 December at the residences of Veronica Klosiewski and Jan Moomaw, respectively, in Niceville, *Okaloosa* (@ FOSRC), to establish the 12th and 13th local records. The latter bird was present until 28 February. An immature male banded by Fred Bassett and C. Saunders on 27 December at Mobile, *Mobile*, provided the 11th Alabama record (ph.; @ ABRC). A female banded by Fred Bassett and C. Stickney on 12 January at Montrose, *Baldwin* (ph.; @ ABRC), established the 12th Alabama record.

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD – At a feeder at the residence of Beth Lucas and Bill Lucas in west Pensacola, *Escambia*, a first year female arrived around 19 November, remained until 17 February, and was observed by over 100 people (banded by Fred Bassett; ph.; second possible Florida state record; @ FOSRC). The third possible Florida state record was provided by a female at a feeder at the residence of Nan Estes and Gene Estes in Niceville, *Okaloosa*, on 24 December that was observed by Charles Parkel, Jr., and Robert McKenney, Jr. (@ FOSRC).

HAIRY WOODPECKER – Bob Duncan had not seen this species in the WP in about 10 years, so his sighting of one at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, on 12 February was noteworthy.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER – An adult male and adult female, present at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, in October and November, continued 5-19 December (Bob Duncan, Lenny Fenimore, Pat Baker). An adult female, perhaps one

of the same individuals just noted, was seen at the same site on 27 February (Alan Knothe) and continued through the end of the winter period. This species is casual in the WP.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER – An individual first seen in October at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, continued 15-20 December (Don Ware, Bob Duncan, Alan Knothe, David Simpson). This species is now rare but regular in the WP. Another bird, probably a different individual, was seen at the same site 28 February (Don Ware) and 1 March (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan).

WESTERN KINGBIRD – Rare in December in the WP, one was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, on 5 December (Bob Duncan), and another was noted 18-20 December (Bill Bremser, Don Ware, m.ob.).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER – Rare in the WP, one was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, on 5 December (Bob Duncan), and two birds were seen at the same site on 19 December (Buck Cooper, Linda Cooper).

HORNED LARK – This species is rare on the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, but Tommy Pratt and Shawn Reed had four at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, on 22 December.

TREE SWALLOW – Rare in winter on the Inland Coastal Plain, two were late at Speigner, *Elmore*, on 2 December (Larry Gardella, Pat Johnson, Tommy Pratt *et al.*).

SWAINSON'S THRUSH – Charles Parkel, Jr., had one at Niceville, *Okaloosa*, on 18 December for a third December record (@ FOSRC).

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER – Bob Reid reported one from the Perdido Pass area, *Baldwin*, on the 30 December Gulf Shores CBC for the ninth winter record for Alabama.

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER – One reported from *Covington* on 24 December represented a rare inland winter record (Carolyn Snow, Phil Snow, S. Adair).

PRAIRIE WARBLER – Rare in Alabama in winter, the eighth and ninth records came from the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin*, on 30 December. Bob Sargent and Martha Sargent had three at one site, while James Peavy and T. Weems had a single at another site.

PALM WARBLER – A remarkable total of 374 from the Gulf Shores CBC, *Baldwin*, on 30 December, set a new maximum for Alabama (previously 200+).

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER – Larry Gardella found one at Wing, *Covington*, on 14 January for the sixth inland winter record.

WILSON'S WARBLER – Casual in December in the WP, several records of

singles were received: 4-7 December, Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* (Ed Case), 9 and 12 December, Pensacola, *Escambia* (Lynn Gould and James Pfeiffer, respectively), and 18 December, *Okaloosa* (Pat Baker; @ FOSRC). The ninth winter record for Alabama came from Foley, *Baldwin*, on 30 December (Phil Tetlow, Betsy Tetlow), as part of the Gulf Shores CBC.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT – Elberta Reid saw an individual in the Perdido Pass area, *Baldwin*, while participating in the Gulf Shores CBC on 30 December, to establish the 11th winter record for Alabama

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW – One was observed at Florence, *Lauderdale*, between 25 December-7 January for the 16th Alabama record (Tom Haggerty, m.ob.; ph.; @ ABRC).

SUMMER TANAGER – Three winter records of this species, casual in December in the WP, were received. One adult female was at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, on 11 December (Bob Duncan), and another female was at Pensacola, *Escambia*, on 12 December (Bob Sargent, Fred Bassett). A male was at Niceville, *Okaloosa*, on 18 December (Charles Parkel, Jr.; @ FOSRC).

WESTERN TANAGER – Casual in the WP, one female was tallied on the Pensacola CBC, *Escambia*, on 16 December (Phil Tetlow, James Pfeiffer).

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW – Winter records for the WP came from the same two sites where this species was observed in fall. One was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 5 December-4 January (Bob Duncan, Don Ware, Ed Case, *et al.*), for the second December record for the area. One was at Ft. Pickens, *Escambia*, on 9 January (Bob Duncan). In Alabama, this species is occasional in winter on the Gulf Coast. On the Perdido Bay CBC, Bob Duncan and Lucy Duncan had one near Lillian, *Baldwin*, on 23 December. On the Gulf Shores CBC, the Duncans had one at Bon Secour, *Baldwin*, on 30 December. At the WTF, *Lowndes*, Larry Gardella, *et al.* found two on 1 January for the second inland winter record for Alabama (ph.).

LARK SPARROW – Rare in winter in Alabama, two records of singles came from the Gulf Coast, the first at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin*, on 2 January (Robert Leier, Lauren Fregeau), and the second at the East End of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, on 5 February (Gavin Bieber).

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW – Casual in winter in the Tennessee Valley, two were located at Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale*, the first on 3 February (Paul Kittle) and the second on 18 February (Paul Kittle, Ned Piper, Moez Ali). Uncommon-rare in winter in inland Alabama, one was found at the WTF, *Lowndes*, on 18 February (Larry Gardella, Pat Johnson).

LE CONTE'S SPARROW - Locally uncommon-rare, one was at Speigner,

Elmore, on 2 December (Larry Gardella *et al.*), while two were at the same site on 15 January (Larry Gardella). One was at the WTF, *Lowndes*, on 8 December (Pat Johnson, m.ob.). Two were recorded from Seven Mile Island WMA, *Lauderdale*, on 3 January (*vide* Bill Rogers).

FOX SPARROW – Rare in the WP, one was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, from 20 December-13 January (Alan Knothe, Bob Duncan *et al.*; @ FOSRC).

LINCOLN'S SPARROW – A single was at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, on 22 December (Tommy Pratt, Shawn Reed), and one was at Speigner, *Elmore*, on 6 January (Pat Johnson); this species is rare in winter for inland Alabama. Casual in the WP, one was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, on 15 December (Don Ware, Lydia Dougherty).

HARRIS'S SPARROW – An adult, first seen on 26 November east of Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale*, continued through 11 December (Ned Piper, Moez Ali *et al.*; ph.; @ ABRC).

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW – The 50+ seen at the WTF, *Lowndes*, on 4 February was a good number (Steve McConnell).

LAPLAND LONGSPUR – Rare on the Inland Coastal Plain, the 200+ seen at the WTF, *Lowndes*, on 3 December was an excellent number (Larry Gardella, Pat Johnson). Steve McConnell had three at an unusual site south of Guntersville, *Marshall*, on 17 December. At Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale*, where this species is uncommon, there were 50+ on 24 December (Eric Soehren, Ned Piper).

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK – An immature male visited a feeder in Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 13 January-3 February (Pat Taylor, Fred Bassett).

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK – The 15th WP record came from Ft. Pickens, *Escambia*, on 3 and 11 December, where an adult female was observed by Peggy Baker and Bob Duncan, while the 16th WP record came from the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, on 20 December, where a female was observed by Alan Knothe and David Simpson (@ FOSRC).

INDIGO BUNTING – Rare in winter in Alabama, two records were received. One was near Lillian, *Baldwin*, on the Perdido Bay CBC on 23 December (Lucy Duncan). Another was in *Baldwin* at Foley on 29 December (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent).

PAINTED BUNTING – Also rare in winter in Alabama, one female was reported from Foley, *Baldwin*, on 29 December (E. Barnett), and one female-type was reported from Belle Fontaine, *Mobile*, from 26-30 January (J. H. Rabby).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD – Casual in the WP, the first February record came from a feeder in Navarre, *Santa Rosa*, on 28 February, where

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

an adult male was observed by Don Marshall and Alan Knothe.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD – Uncommon in the Tennessee Valley, 50 were at Donnegon Slough, *Colbert*, on 5 January (Damien Simbeck). On 6 January, five were below Guntersville Dam, *Marshall*, where this species is rare this far east in the Tennessee Valley (Tom Brindley *et al.*). The 100 reported near Moulton, *Lawrence*, on 5 February (Damien Simbeck) was a good number.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE – Rare in winter in the WP, an immature male was recorded on the Pensacola CBC, *Escambia*, on 16 December (Ann Forster, Dan Forster, Alan Sheppard).

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE – A first-year male, first seen 22 November and potentially the first state record for Florida, continued through 30 December at a feeder at the residence of Charles and Betty Kahn in Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, (m.ob.; v.t. by Brooks Atherton; @ FOSRC).

RED CROSSBILL – Along the Pinhoti Trail near Coleman Lake, Talladega National Forest, *Cleburne*, Steve McConnell had 11 on 18 February. This species is rare but regular at this site.

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