

SPRING SIGHTINGS (MARCH - MAY 2002)

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This report covers the period from March through May 2002 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; “FWBSF” = Ft. Walton Beach Sewerage Facility; “m.ob.” = many observers; “NF” = National Forest; “NWR” = National Wildlife Refuge; “ph.” = photographed; “SP” = State Park; “WP” = Western Panhandle of Florida (*Escambia*, *Okaloosa*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Walton* counties); “WTF” = Woerner Turf Farm.

RED-THROATED LOON – A late individual of this rare but regular species was on Little Lagoon, Gulf Shores, *Baldwin*, 11 April (Larry Gardella, Shawn Reed, G. Beaton, Steve McConnell).

PACIFIC LOON – Rare but regular along the Gulf Coast, one was seen at Pensacola Beach, *Escambia*, on the late date of 18 May (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan), and a single was on Little Lagoon, Gulf Shores, *Baldwin*, 11 April (Larry Gardella).

PIED-BILLED GREBE – This species is a rare and irregular breeder in Alabama, so the six nests found on one sinkhole pond near Leighton, *Colbert*, 4 May (Paul Kittle *et al.*) was an outstanding number. Another breeding record came from Murphy Hill Reservation, *Marshall*, 25 May with the report of an adult with 4-6 young (Dick Reynolds, Linda Reynolds).

- CORY'S SHEARWATER** - Accidental in northwest Florida, 2+ birds were reported from Sandestin, *Walton*, 8 April (Jack Carusos).
- GREATER SHEARWATER** – Casual in northwest Florida, 3-4 birds were reported from Sandestin, *Walton*, 8 April (Jack Carusos).
- SOOTY SHEARWATER** – The 10th record for the WP was established by the sighting of a single at Ft. Pickens, *Escambia*, 9 April (Lucy Duncan, Lydia Daugherty).
- BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL** – On 27 May a bird landed on a fishing boat 25 mi S of Pensacola Pass, *Escambia*, and was taken to Wildlife Sanctuary (*vide* Dorothy Kaufmann). This species is casual in the WP, and most specimens have been secured from fishermen bringing them to Wildlife Sanctuary.
- MASKED BOOBY** – The first April record for northwest Florida was set by a single at Sandestin, *Walton*, 8 April (Jack Carusos).
- AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** – This species is rare inland, so the sighting of a single at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, 29-30 April (Damien Simbeck) was noteworthy.
- BROWN PELICAN** – Two were seen on the Coosa River south of Lake Jordan, *Elmore*, 27 April (N. Butler) (casual inland).
- AMERICAN BITTERN** – Because this species is rarely detected inland, the following records of singles are noteworthy: Tuskegee NF, *Macon*, 1 April (Barry Fleming) and Oakland Marsh, *Lauderdale*, 5 May (Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner, Moez Ali).
- LITTLE BLUE HERON** – Locally rare in spring in northwest Alabama, one adult was seen at Marion County Lake, *Marion*, 10 May (Jud Johnston).
- REDDISH EGRET** – The white morph is rare in Alabama, but one was spotted on Little Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 19 April (John Dindo) and 21 April (Greg Jackson, Debi Jackson).
- WHITE-FACED IBIS** – One observed at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, 19-20 March (W. Chambers, m.ob.; ph.) was the third inland record for Alabama and the 13th record for the state (@ ABRC).
- ROSS'S GOOSE** – Still rare but increasing in Alabama, singles were noted at Bon Secour, *Baldwin*, 3 March (Howard Horne, Keith Kamper, Ben Garmon) (eighth Gulf Coast record) and Snowdown, *Montgomery*, 23 April (Larry Gardella) (ninth Inland Coastal Plain record).
- MOTTLED DUCK** – Successful breeding of this coastal species was documented with the observation of three adults with six downy young at the airport marsh on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 21 April (Greg Jackson, Debi Jackson).

- SURF SCOTER** – One female-type bird was late on the Dauphin Island Causeway north of Cedar Point, *Mobile*, 18 April (Steve McConnell).
- RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** – Uncommon on the Inland Coastal Plain, two were spotted in the Mexia quad, *Monroe*, 25 May (latest departure date for this region) (Carolyn Snow, L. Bailey).
- RUDDY DUCK** – An alternate-plumaged male was observed at Speigner, *Elmore* (the same site where one summered in 2001), on the late date of 26 May (Larry Gardella),
- MISSISSIPPI KITE** – This species is rare in the Tennessee Valley, but a single was noted at Madison, *Madison*, 14 May (Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten, Dwight Cooley).
- BALD EAGLE** – As a breeder in Alabama, this species is rare but increasing. Continued nesting at two sites was documented: two young were in a nest at Heiberger, *Perry*, 16 March (Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton), and a pair and one young were seen at a nest on Short Creek Embayment of Lake Guntersville, *Marshall*, 24-28 March (D. Dodd). A pair and one young were at a new nest on Second Creek Embayment of Pickwick Reservoir, Waterloo, *Lauderdale*, 26 March (Keith Hudson, Paul Kittle, Donna Kittle). Possible nesting was indicated by sightings of single adults at the Marion Fish Hatchery, *Perry*, 16 March (Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton) and along the Cahaba River at Mountain Brook, *Jefferson*, 23 and 28 May (Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton, B. Allen).
- SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** – A late record for the Gulf Coast was set by a bird seen 26 May at Chickasaw, *Mobile* (Keith Kamper).
- GOLDEN EAGLE** – Linda Reynolds saw an immature at Wyeth Mountain near Guntersville, *Marshall*, 15 March (rare in Alabama).
- AMERICAN KESTREL** – A rare but increasing breeder in central Alabama, fledglings were found in downtown Birmingham, *Jefferson*, and at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, *Tuscaloosa*. They were returned to the wild on 22 May (Anne G. Miller *et al.*).
- MERLIN** – One seen 22 May at Meridianville, *Madison* (Moez Ali) was very late.
- BLACK RAIL** – This secretive species is rare but regular in spring at the airport marsh on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, where one was noted 2 April (C. Parkel).
- VIRGINIA RAIL** – Uncommon in the Tennessee Valley, a single was spotted at Oakland Marsh, *Lauderdale*, 5 May (Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner, Moez Ali).

- PURPLE GALLINULE** – Occasional in the Mountain Region, an injured bird found in Birmingham, *Jefferson*, 16 May was sent to a rehabilitation center (*vide* Anne G. Miller).
- COMMON MOORHEN** – Larry Gardella recorded this species at Trickem, *Montgomery*, 7 April where it is locally rare.
- SNOWY PLOVER** – Now a rare breeder on the mainland coast of Alabama, a pair and one downy young were seen at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin*, 11 May (Eric Soehren).
- AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** – Merilu Rose and Rufus Rose had one at Pensacola Beach, *Escambia*, 18 April where it is casual. J. Lloyd *et al.* saw two at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin*, 23 March where the species is uncommon.
- GREATER YELLOWLEGS** – A new maximum count for inland Alabama was made 1 March at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone*, where David George recorded 96.
- LESSER YELLOWLEGS** – Two presumably wintering birds were spotted at Wheeler NWR, *Limestone*, 1 March (David George) (rare in winter in Tennessee Valley).
- WILLET** – A rare species inland, one was found at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, 29 April (Damien Simbeck).
- RED KNOT** – Four late individuals of this uncommon species were noted 19 May on Pelican Island, *Mobile* (Howard Horne, Keith Kamper).
- SANDERLING** – Rare inland in spring, a single was noted near Leighton, *Colbert*, 5 May (Damien Simbeck).
- BAIRD'S SANDPIPER** – This species is rare in spring in Alabama. Two records were received, a single on the west end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 20 April (Larry Gardella) and the excellent number of six near Leighton, *Colbert*, 20 May (Damien Simbeck).
- RUFF** – The fifth record for Alabama was established by a single bird seen at WTF, *Lowndes*, 17 March (Larry Gardella; @ABRC).
- WILSON'S PHALAROPE** – One sighted at Bayou LaBatre, *Mobile*, 27 May (Keith Kamper) set a new late departure record for Alabama.
- JAEGER SP.** – Steve McConnell sighted one bird (a probable Pomarine) from the Dauphin Island-Ft. Morgan ferry, *Baldwin*, 19 April.
- LAUGHING GULL** – This species is now regular but rare in the Tennessee Valley. At Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, one was present 29 April while two were there 4 May (Damien Simbeck).
- GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** – Still rare in Alabama, one was spotted

from the Dauphin Island-Ft. Morgan Ferry, *Baldwin*, 18 April (Will Duncan, Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan).

COMMON TERN – Uncommon-rare for inland Alabama, two were found at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, 29 April (Damien Simbeck).

LEAST TERN – Two at Guin, *Marion*, 25 April established an early arrival date for inland Alabama (Jud Johnston). This species is rare in the Mountain Region.

SOOTY TERN – Rare onshore in Alabama (and possibly increasing), this species was recorded from Pelican Island, *Mobile*, 19 May (one bird) and 27 May (three birds) (Howard Horne, Keith Kamper).

BLACK TERN – One at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, 29 April (Damien Simbeck) set a new early spring arrival date for the Tennessee Valley.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE – The following records help to document the continued expansion of this species in Alabama: a pair building a nest near Florence, *Lauderdale*, 10 April (Donna Kittle, Paul Kittle); two at Pelham, *Shelby*, 4 May (Ann L. Miller) (rare near Birmingham); two calling at a known site in Huntsville, *Madison*, 8 May (Tom Brindley); and one at Kirk's Grove, *Cherokee*, 31 May (Marion Dobbs).

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO – This species is rarely detected inland, but one was recorded from Bankhead NF, *Lawrence*, 5 May (Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner, Moez Ali).

WHIP-POOR-WILL – Larry Gardella heard one at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 11 May, to establish a late departure date for the non-breeding area of the Inland Coastal Plain.

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER – Rare in spring, one was observed at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 7 May (Tom Haggerty).

WILLOW FLYCATCHER – One singing at Florence, *Lauderdale*, 28-29 April was the fifth Alabama record (Damien Simbeck *et al.*; @ABRC).

LEAST FLYCATCHER – Rare in spring in northwest Alabama, one was seen at Mt. Hope, *Lawrence*, 5 May (Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner, Moez Ali).

GRAY KINGBIRD – This species is now rare on the Gulf Coast. Records of singles came from Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 19 April (Steve McConnell), and Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 29 April (D. Kisiel, S. Kisiel) and 11 May (J. Lloyd, P. Blevins).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER – This species appears to be increasing as a breeder, and these records were of birds that returned to known breeding sites and were probably nesting: three, Meridianville, *Madison*, 27 April+ (K. Ward *et al.*); Priceville, *Morgan*, one 28 April and two 22 May

(C. Lamont); and a pair, Madison, *Madison*, 1 May (Dean Cutten). Two records came from sites new for the species: one possibly nesting at Lafayette, *Chambers*, 4-11 May (N. Blanton *et al.*; ph.), and one at Forkland, *Greene*, 8 May (R. DeWitt, P. Trull; ph.). An odd record of a juvenile that arrived with trans-Gulf migrants at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin*, 2 May was reported by Bob Duncan. Four birds seen at the Shell Mounds on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 24 March (L. West) were early and a new maximum spring high for the Gulf Coast.

WARBLING VIREO – A single at Madison, *Madison*, 1 May (Dean Cutten) was a rare migrant, while three singing at Waterloo, *Lauderdale*, 4 May (Paul Kittle, *et al.*) had returned to a known nesting site.

PHILADELPHIA VIREO – One at Madison, *Madison*, 20 May (Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten) set a late departure record for the Tennessee Valley.

BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO – Rare but regular on the Gulf Coast, two were banded between 8-22 April at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin* (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent *et al.*).

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER – This western species was a real surprise at Cheaha SP, *Cleburne*, 19 April – 5 May (G. Johnson, R. Johnson, m.ob.; ph.; @ABRC). This was the first record of the species for Alabama. (See article in this issue of *Alabama Birdlife*)

FISH CROW – Two were heard calling repeatedly at Riverchase, *Shelby*, 25 March (Greg Jackson, Debi Jackson), where the species is uncommon.

TREE SWALLOW – A rare breeder in Alabama that appears to be increasing. Four nests were documented at Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale*, 2 May+ (Paul Kittle). One pair was at Henson Springs, *Lamar*, 25 May (Jud Johnston), a site where it is known to nest. A pair seen east of Scottsboro, *Jackson*, 20 May (Rick West) indicates probable breeding at that site.

CLIFF SWALLOW – This is another swallow that continues to increase as a breeder in Alabama, with documented nesting at two new sites. Two pairs were nesting at Germany Ferry on the Tallapoosa River, *Tallapoosa*, 27 April (Rick West), and one pair was nesting at the U.S. 31 bridge over the Alabama River, *Montgomery/Autauga*, 26 May (Larry Gardella).

CAVE SWALLOW – At Ft. Pickens, *Escambia*, Will Duncan and Bob Duncan studied an individual at close range 15 March to set the fourth record for the area. At Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, Lucy Duncan observed one at leisure for over 30 minutes 14 April to set the fifth area record. One seen 14 -17 April at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin* (Jane Hinman, Phil Berry, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow *et al.*) was the 16th Alabama record (@ ABRC).

- RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** – Two that lingered at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 5 May (Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten) tied the latest departure date for the Tennessee Valley.
- HERMIT THRUSH** – A late bird was spotted at Byrne Lake, *Baldwin*, 13 April (Steve McConnell).
- TENNESSEE WARBLER** – At Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin*, a single on 23 March was early (J. Lloyd *et al.*).
- NASHVILLE WARBLER** – Rare but regular in spring in the Tennessee Valley, singles were noted at *Madison*, *Madison*, 1 May (female) and 3 May (singing male), and at Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 5 May (singing male) (Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten).
- NORTHERN PARULA** – Two early birds were reported. A singing male was along South Sandy Creek in the Oakmulgee Unit of Talladega NF, *Tuscaloosa/Hale*, 10 March (David George), and at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 15 March (Larry Gardella).
- MAGNOLIA WARBLER** – David Dortch found a male at Montrose, *Baldwin*, 1 April, the earliest this species is known to have arrived in Alabama.
- BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** – An uncommon migrant in the Mountain Region, one was spotted at Birmingham, *Jefferson*, 2 May (Alice Christenson).
- BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** – One seen at Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale*, 28 March (Paul Kittle, Donna Kittle) was an early local migrant.
- PRAIRIE WARBLER** – One heard at Grove Hill, *Clarke*, 17 March (L. Bailey) was the earliest for inland Alabama, while another singing male in the Oakmulgee Unit of Talladega NF, *Bibb*, 23 March (David George) was also early.
- PALM WARBLER** – Barry Fleming established a new maximum count for inland Alabama when he tallied 250+ at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, 12 April.
- BLACKPOLL WARBLER** – An early male appeared at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 17 April (Larry Gardella).
- CERULEAN WARBLER** – The first possible breeding in decades for this species in northeast Alabama was indicated by three singing males near Estill Fork, *Jackson*, 31 May (Dwight Cooley, Scott Gravette).
- BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** – John Porter had an early single at Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 14 March, while Stan and Dana Hamilton had three early birds at Perry Lake near Marion, *Perry*, 16 March.

- SWAINSON'S WARBLER** – The Sargents *et al.* banded a good total of 19 at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin*, 8 - 22 April. One was found at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 20 May (Damien Simbeck, Tom Haggerty) (rare breeder in Tennessee Valley).
- CONNECTICUT WARBLER** – Always a rare migrant in Alabama, one male was found at a regular site in Madison, *Madison*, 19 May (Moez Ali).
- MOURNING WARBLER** – Rare but regular during spring migration in the Tennessee Valley, one was recorded at a regular site in Madison, *Madison*, 19 May (Moez Ali).
- HOODED WARBLER** – An early male was seen in Birmingham, *Jefferson*, 28 March (K. White, P. White).
- LARK SPARROW** – Expanding as a breeder in Alabama, a pair of adults and a fledgling were noted at a new site at Old Kingston, *Autauga*, 26 May (Shawn Reed).
- GRASSHOPPER SPARROW** – The two or more individuals noted at Speigner, *Elmore*, 26 May (Larry Gardella) were uncommon for this location.
- LINCOLN'S SPARROW** – This species is rare in spring in Alabama, so one near Florence, *Lauderdale*, 1 May (Paul Kittle) was notable.
- WHITE-THROATED SPARROW** – One was late departing Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 31 May-2 June (Larry Gardella).
- HARRIS'S SPARROW** – A single at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 10 April (Don Ware, Lydia Daugherty, Jack Carusos) established the fifth area record.
- WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW** – The two or more individuals noted at Speigner, *Elmore*, 5 May (Tommy Pratt) were late for this location.
- ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK** – The earliest arrival date for the Inland Coastal Plain was established by a single at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 9 April (Larry Gardella, Andrea Menyhert).
- PAINTED BUNTING** – A male and female at a feeder east of Mooresville, *Limestone*, 22 April (Dan Fitzjarrald, Ruth Swann) set the first record for this species in the Tennessee Valley.
- YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** – A male at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 4-7 April (D. Sellers; ph.) may have been returning to this site since a male was photographed here in April 2001. The species is very rare for inland Alabama.
- PURPLE FINCH** – One at Clay, *Jefferson*, 15 May (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent) established the latest departure date for the Mountain Region.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL - One female-type at a feeder in Killen, *Lauderdale*, 26 April and 5-20 May (Shirley Wayland, Jim Wayland, m.ob.; ph., Fig. 1) was possibly the first for Alabama (see following record; @ABRC).

CROSSBILL SP. - A juvenile that was “wing-barred” visited a feeder in Clay, *Jefferson*, 12 March (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent) and was listed as a White-winged (@ABRC).

COMMON REDPOLL - One noted at Tuscaloosa, *Tuscaloosa*, 17 March (J. Thompson) was the 11th record for Alabama (@ABRC).

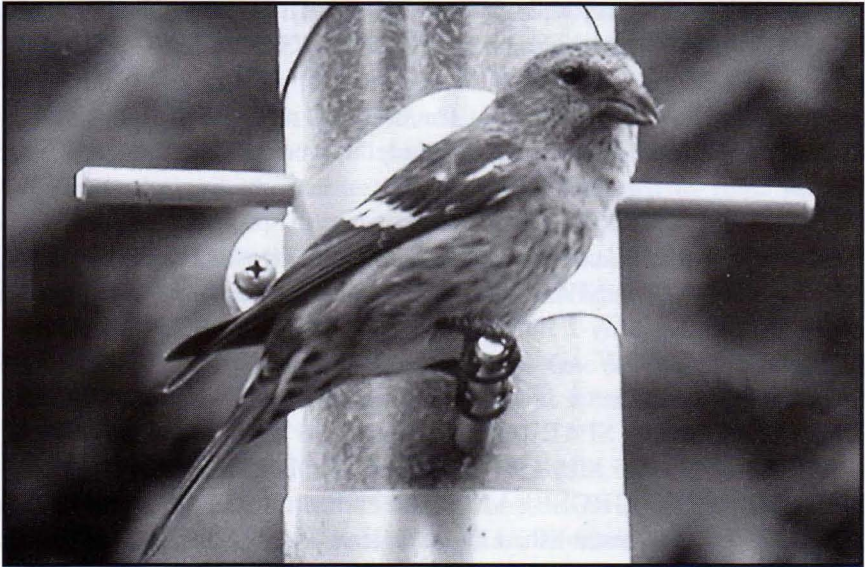


FIGURE 1. Female-type White-winged Crossbill at a feeder in Killen, Lauderdale Co., AL, 26 April and 5-20 May (photograph by Raelene and Dean Cutten , 7 May 2002).

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