

**SPRING SIGHTINGS (MARCH - MAY 2003)**

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This report covers the period from March through May 2003 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; “b.” = banded; “BBS” = Breeding Bird Survey; “FOSRC” = Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee; “FWBSF” = Fort Walton Beach Sewerage Facility; “m.ob.” = many observers; “NF” = National Forest; “NWR” = National Wildlife Refuge; “ph.” = photographed; “SP” = State Park; “v.t.” = videotaped; “WP” = Western Panhandle of Florida (*Escambia*, *Okaloosa*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Walton* counties); “WTF” = Woerner Turf Farm.

**PACIFIC LOON** – Rare along the Gulf Coast, one was found at Fort Pickens, *Escambia*, 2 April (Merilu Rose, Jan Osborn *et al.*), while three were at the same site 23 May (Bob Duncan).

**COMMON LOON** – A new maximum for the Mountain Region was set by the observation of 124 in *Jefferson/Shelby*, 29 April, with 105 at Lake Purdy and 19 at Oak Mountain SP Fishing Lake (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson, Harriett Wright, Alice Stevenson).

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** – This species is an erratic and localized breeder in Alabama, so a pair with three young in Tuskegee NF, *Macon*, 29 May (Tyler Hicks) and the three broods found on a sinkhole pond near Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 30 May (Paul Kittle) were noteworthy.

- BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL** – Casual in the WP, a bird found offshore from Pensacola, *Escambia*, 13 April by Joe Mills was taken to Wildlife Sanctuary of Northwest Florida and identified by Dorothy Kaufmann and Andy Kratter (specimen to Florida State Museum).
- AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** – Up to four were seen at Town Creek Marsh, *Colbert*, 28 February-7 March (Andrew Haffenden, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner) where the species is locally rare. Two were locally rare so late at Orange Beach, *Baldwin*, 31 May (Ross Primrose, Love Primrose; ph.).
- BROWN PELICAN** – One was spotted at Florala, *Covington*, 17 April (Jeff Garner) (occasional inland).
- AMERICAN BITTERN** – This species is rarely recorded on the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, so one south of Prattville, *Autauga*, 17-30 March (Tommy Pratt *et al.*) was noteworthy.
- GREAT EGRET** – Near Leighton, *Colbert*, 28 were counted 20 May, a high number for a species that is locally rare in spring (Paul Kittle).
- SNOWY EGRET** – One was found near Leighton, *Colbert*, 20 May (Paul Kittle) where the species is locally rare in spring.
- BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** – A single was found at Bellwood, *Geneva*, 30 May (Don Ware) where the species is locally rare.
- GLOSSY IBIS** – Six dark-eyed birds were observed at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 11 April (Bob Duncan), with a single there 15 April (Don Ware) (casual in the WP).
- PLEGADIS SP.** – At least 10 probable Glossy Ibises were at Blakeley Island, *Mobile*, 18 April (Jody Brown; ph.), a good number.
- GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** – Except for Eufaula NWR, this species is rare on the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, so two spotted north of Opelika, *Lee*, 27 March (Tyler Hicks) were noteworthy.
- ROSS'S GOOSE** – Still rare but becoming regular in Alabama, a single was noted near Leighton, *Colbert*, 21 March (Shirley Wayland)- 2 April (Damien Simbeck *et al.*).
- TRUMPETER SWAN** – The four swans that wintered in Rocky Bayou, Niceville, *Okaloosa*, departed on 2 March (*fide* Don Ware). These birds represent a potential first state record (@FOSRC).
- BLUE-WINGED TEAL** – Twelve discovered on the Alabama River in *Elmore*, 7 March (Tasha McLain) were early.
- REDHEAD** – Steve McConnell counted 378 on Wilson Reservoir above Wil-



son Dam, *Lauderdale/Colbert*, 11 March, a good number.

**SURF SCOTER** – One immature established the first record for the Inland Coastal Plain at Lee County Public Lake, *Lee*, 22 March (Tyler Hicks, m.ob.).

**WHITE-WINGED SCOTER** – The first April WP record for this duck was set by two birds found at Fort Pickens, *Escambia*, 25 April (Lucy Duncan, Stuart Strahl).

**LONG-TAILED DUCK** – One female at Lee County Public Lake, *Lee*, 22 March (Tyler Hicks, m.ob.) was rare for the Inland Coastal Plain.

**HOODED MERGANSER** – This duck is a rare and localized breeder in Alabama, so the following reports of nesting activity were significant: a nest found 27 April and three pairs observed 29 May in Tuskegee NF, *Macon* (Tyler Hicks), and a female with four young seen at Bethsaida, *Franklin*, 30 May (Paul Kittle).

**SWALLOW-TAILED KITE** – One was observed carrying nesting material along the Tensaw River between Globe and Little Bear creeks, *Baldwin*, 21 March (Keith Gauldin) (nesting activity rarely documented).

**MISSISSIPPI KITE** – A single on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 19 March (Carolyn Henning) set a new early arrival record for Alabama. Occasional in the Mountain Region, one was at Cahaba Heights, *Jefferson*, 13 May (Helen Kittinger, m.ob.).

**BALD EAGLE** – Continued nesting at two sites was documented: one young was in a nest near Big Nance Creek at Red Bank, *Lawrence*, and a pair was seen at a nest at Waterloo, *Lauderdale*, both records 7 March (Keith Hudson, aerial survey). Pairs of adults seen at two sites, north of Auburn, *Lee*, 27 March – 27 June (Tyler Hicks) and on the Autaugaville BBS, *Autauga*, 29 May (Carolyn Snow), were locally rare if breeding.

**BROAD-WINGED HAWK** – One at Pensacola, *Escambia*, 9 March (Betsy Tetlow) was very early.

**KING RAIL** – Rare in the Tennessee Valley, a single was heard at Oakland Marsh, *Lauderdale*, 5 May (Steve McConnell, Damien Simbeck, Jeff Garner), a site where it is regular in spring.

**SANDHILL CRANE** – Ginger Duncan observed two at Irondale, *Jefferson*, 8 March (rare in Mountain Region).

**AMERICAN GOLDEN- PLOVER** – Twenty-five were at Harpersville, *Shelby*, 2 April (Harriett Wright, Edith Hunt, Alice Stevenson), a good number for the Mountain Region.

**AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** – Three were at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 20 April (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson, Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton *et*

*al.*), a good number for this side of Mobile Bay.

**AMERICAN AVOCET** – A maximum inland count (33) for Alabama was made at the Alabama A&M Farms, *Madison*, 21 April (Ken Ward).

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** – A new maximum count for the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama was made 11 March along the Alabama River north of Montgomery, *Elmore/Montgomery*, where Michael Jordan recorded 71.

**UPLAND SANDPIPER** – Twenty was a good number for the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama at the WTF, *Lowndes*, 13 April (Larry Gardella).

**MARbled GODWIT** – This shorebird is casual in the WP, so eight birds seen at Fort Pickens, *Escambia*, 25 April were notable (Lucy Duncan, Stuart Strahl).

**WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER** – It was determined that a bird seen at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 26 April (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow) had been banded in Argentina in fall 2001.

**BAIRD'S SANDPIPER** – Casual in the WP, five birds were counted at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 28 April (Don Ware). A single was rare in spring and early at Pinto Pass, *Mobile*, 1 April (Mike Resch).

**PECTORAL SANDPIPER** – The WTF, *Lowndes*, was a good spot for this species this season, with 150 being a good number so early on 9 March (Larry Gardella). Barry Fleming found 195 on 22 March and Larry Gardella estimated 200+ on 23 March, the latter a maximum spring number for the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama.

**STILT SANDPIPER** – Rarely seen in spring in the Mountain Region, a single was noted at Harpersville, *Shelby*, 10 May (Helen Kittinger, Elouise Rafferty).

**BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER** – Casual in spring in the WP, singles were noted at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 26 April (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow, Cheryl Jones) and Pensacola, *Escambia*, 2 May (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan). This shorebird was early at the WTF, *Lowndes*, with three there on 22 March (Barry Fleming) and two on 23 March (Larry Gardella).

**WILSON'S PHALAROPE** – A single was recorded at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 14 May (Don Ware) (casual in the WP). Five represented a good number for the Tennessee Valley near Leighton, *Colbert*, 7 May (Damien Simbeck).

**JAEGER SP.** – J. Stowe sighted one bird at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin*, 29 April (rare).

**LAUGHING GULL** – Rare inland but regular at Wilson Dam, *Colbert/Lauderdale*, 1-3 were present 5-16 May (Steve McConnell, Jeff Garner, Damien Simbeck).

**HEERMANN'S GULL** – One was seen from a fishing boat in Choctawhatchee



Bay, *Okaloosa*, 18 May (Charlie Saleebe; ph.; @FOSRC) and relocated in Destin Harbor 19 May (Lenny Fenimore) and 20 May (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Sam Tagatz, Cecil Brown, Chris Cameron). This was the first record for the WP and the second for Florida.

**SANDWICH TERN** – Two were early at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 18 March (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow).

**COMMON TERN** – Eight were at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 18 March (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow). Bill Summerour found 25 at the same site 27 March, a good number for the season.

**LEAST TERN** – Carolyn Henning found an early bird at Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 19 March.

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** – A nest with two young was observed 2-16 April in west Pensacola, *Escambia* (Mary Jones). This was the first breeding record for the WP, and other possible breeding pairs were reported in *Okaloosa* and *Santa Rosa* throughout April into May (*fide* Bob Duncan). This species also continues to increase in Alabama. Twelve were noted on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 25 March (Chris Price), and one was at a feeder in Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 7 May (Fred Bassett) (sixth record for Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama).

**COMMON GROUND-DOVE** – A new maximum spring count (9) for the Gulf Coast of Alabama was made at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 1 April (Larry Gardella).

**BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO** – Rare in the WP, three were found at Fort Pickens, *Escambia*, 25 April (Lucy Duncan, Bob Duncan, Stuart Strahl *et al.*).

**CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW** – One was early at Vestavia, *Jefferson*, 8 April (Paul Franklin).

**WHIP-POOR-WILL** – Five were heard calling 25 March near Old Nauvoo, *Franklin*, establishing a new early record for the Tennessee Valley (Paul Kittle). One heard at Autaugaville, *Autauga*, 29 May (Carolyn Snow) was at the southernmost possible breeding site in Alabama.

**CHIMNEY SWIFT** – One was early at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 13 March (Carolyn Henning).

**BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD** – A single at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin*, 9 March was the 15th for Alabama (Fred Bassett, Kate Wheate, David Dortch; b., ph., v.t., @ABRC).

**OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER** – Rare in spring, one was observed north of Courtland, *Lawrence*, 3 May (Paul Kittle, m.ob.), and another single was

spotted at Florence, *Lauderdale*, 6 May (Tom Haggerty).

**WILLOW FLYCATCHER** – One singing at St. Florian, *Lauderdale*, 4 May was the 18th Alabama record (Damien Simbeck; @ABRC).

**“TRAILL’S” FLYCATCHER** – Rare in spring, one was noted at Colbert Ferry Park, *Colbert*, 5 May (Steve McConnell, Jeff Garner, Damien Simbeck).

**WESTERN KINGBIRD** – Casual in the WP in spring, singles were noted at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 21 March and 1 May (Bob Duncan) and at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 5 May (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow).

**EASTERN KINGBIRD** – One was early at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 17 March (Carolyn Henning).

**GRAY KINGBIRD** – This species is now rare on the Gulf Coast. A record of a single came from Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 25 April (David Dortch *et al.*; ph.).

**SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER** – A pair at the Alabama A&M Farms, *Madison*, 15 April+ (Ken Ward *et al.*) was at a known nesting site.

**WHITE-EYED VIREO** – Six at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 18 March (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan *et al.*) was a good number so early in the season.

**BLUE-HEADED VIREO** – One singing near Wolfpen Camp in Bankhead NF, *Winston*, 29 May (Scott Gravette) set the second possible breeding record for northwest Alabama.

**RED-EYED VIREO** – Two arrived early at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 18 March (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan *et al.*), and another was early at Lee County Public Lake, *Lee*, 29 March (Tyler Hicks).

**BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO** – Two early individuals were banded 4 April and 7 April at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent, Fred Bassett *et al.*).

**CAVE SWALLOW** – Casual in the WP, singles were found at two sites: FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 11 April (Bob Duncan) and 10 May (Don Ware), and Fort Pickens, *Escambia*, 12 April (Lucy Duncan *et al.*). The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> records for Alabama were set, respectively, by a single seen at Bayou La Batre, *Mobile*, 8 and 11 April (Andrew Haffenden *et al.*; @ABRC), and by another single at the Dauphin Island Airport, *Mobile*, 18-22 April (Larry Gardella, Alison Glascock, Charles Glascock, m.ob.; @ABRC).

**BARN SWALLOW** – Larry Gardella’s observation of singles at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* and the Dauphin Island Causeway, *Mobile*, both 1 March, set a new early arrival date for the Gulf Coast of Alabama.

**SEDGE WREN** – Two seen north of Auburn, *Lee*, 27 May (Tyler Hicks) were



the latest for Alabama except for one June record.

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** – Early for the Tennessee Valley, singles were noted at Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale*, 23 March (Paul Kittle) and Wheeler NWR, *Limestone*, 25 March (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson).

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** – One banded at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 29 May (Fred Bassett) set a late record for inland Alabama.

**HERMIT THRUSH** – One spotted at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 4 May (Michael Jordan) set a late record for the Gulf Coast of Alabama.

**AMERICAN PIPIT** – A single was late at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 5 May (Steve McConnell, Jeff Garner, Damien Simbeck).

**SPRAGUE'S PIPIT** – An individual seen and heard at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 29 March (Barry Fleming; @ABRC) set the 17<sup>th</sup> record for Alabama.

**“BREWSTER'S WARBLER”** – Rare in Alabama, one was recorded on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 13 April (Jud Johnston, Jared Caudle *et al.*; v.t.).

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** – Tyler Hicks found two late birds in Tuskegee NF, *Macon*, 23 April.

**NASHVILLE WARBLER** – The first spring record for the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama was set 23 April when Tyler Hicks observed a single male in Tuskegee NF, *Macon*.

**NORTHERN PARULA** – A male at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, 2 March (Lorna West) set an early arrival date for inland Alabama, while two singing males at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 10 March (Larry Gardella) were also early.

**YELLOW WARBLER** – One at Florence, *Lauderdale*, 8 April (Bill Rogers) was early.

**CAPE MAY WARBLER** – Uncommon on the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, the following records were received: one at Auburn, *Lee*, 21 April (Geoff Hill, Tyler Hicks); one at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 26 April (Larry Gardella); and three in Tuskegee NF, *Macon*, 8 May (Tyler Hicks).

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** – Rare for inland Alabama, reports of singles came from the following locations: Auburn, *Lee*, 24 April (Geoff Hill, Tyler Hicks); Opelika, *Lee*, 29 April (Paul Milotis) and 7 May (Lorna West); Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 29 April (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson); and Tuskegee NF, *Macon*, 8 May (Jeff Stratford) and 9 May (Tyler Hicks) (fourth record for Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama).

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** – One seen north of Birmingham, *Jefferson*, 25 March (Karen White, Phillip White) was early.

**BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER** – Carolyn Snow observed a late bird at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 12 May.

- YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER** – An early arrival was in the Oakmulgee Unit of Talladega NF, *Tuscaloosa*, 12 March (Harriett Wright, Alice Stevenson, Edith Hunt).
- PRAIRIE WARBLER** – One at Perry Lake, *Marion*, 29 March (Richard Reynolds, Helen Kittinger, m.ob.) was early.
- BLACKPOLL WARBLER** – Early singles were found at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 17 April (Larry Gardella) and the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, *Jefferson*, 22 April (Greg Harber, Jessica Germany), while 11 at Opelika, *Lee*, 28 April (Lorna West) was a good number locally.
- BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** – The observation of a single at Eufaula NWR, *Barbour*, 3 March (Lorna West) set an early record for the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, while a pair found at Dozier, *Crenshaw*, 25 May (Carolyn Snow, Phil Snow) indicated probable breeding (unusual this far south in the state).
- PROTHONOTARY WARBLER** – Larry Gardella observed an early bird at Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 25 March.
- WORM-EATING WARBLER** – The 157 banded at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 4-18 April (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent, Fred Bassett *et al.*) was a good number, with 52 on 13 April and 38 on 14 April.
- SWAINSON'S WARBLER** – One was found at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 26 April - 5 May (Damien Simbeck *et al.*) (rare breeder in Tennessee Valley but regular at this site for a few years).
- OVENBIRD** – The 37 banded at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 9 April (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent, Fred Bassett *et al.*) was a maximum spring number for the Gulf Coast of Alabama.
- KENTUCKY WARBLER** - The 55 banded at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 13 April (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent, Fred Bassett *et al.*) was a maximum spring number for the Gulf Coast of Alabama.
- MOURNING WARBLER** – A single of this rare migrant was spotted at Florence, *Lauderdale*, 25 May (Tom Haggerty).
- HOODED WARBLER** – Banding activities at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin* (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent, Fred Bassett *et al.*), produced good numbers on 14 April (97) and 18 April (94).
- LARK SPARROW** – Rare but increasing in Alabama, the following records were received: one at the Alabama A&M Farms, *Madison*, 29 April (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson); one at Autaugaville, *Autauga*, 26 May (Shawn Reed); and one at Oakville Indian Mounds, *Lawrence*, 27 May, a site where they have been seen before (Helen Kittinger, m.ob.).



**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** – Casual in the WP, singles were found at two sites: Fort Pickens, *Escambia*, 12 April (Lucy Duncan *et al.*), and Molino, *Escambia*, 14 April (Gene Fleming). This species is rare in spring in Alabama, so one at Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 26 April (Damien Simbeck *et al.*) was notable.

**DICKCISSEL** – At the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 12-16 singing males were observed 5 May in a field with tall grass, giving every indication of intent to breed (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Betsy Tetlow). This field was completely mowed within a few days and the birds departed. There are no breeding records for Florida,

**PAINTED BUNTING** – Only occasional in the Mountain Region, one was found 15 miles north of Auburn, *Lee*, 21 April (Tyler Hicks). Rare but increasing on the Inland Coastal Plain of Alabama, a single was found at Bear Creek Swamp, *Autauga*, 26 May (Shawn Reed).

**YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** – An adult male was photographed at Madison, *Madison*, 29 March (Greg Thomas). One at a feeder in Montgomery, *Montgomery*, 13 April+ (Debbie Sellers; ph.) returned to this site for the third year (occasional for inland Alabama).

**BREWER'S BLACKBIRD** – Five seen at Greenbrier, *Limestone*, 25 March (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson) were late.

**SHINY COWBIRD** – Casual in the WP, one was at a feeder in Niceville, *Okaloosa*, 3 April (Alan Knothe, Jesse Knothe), another was seen in Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 12 May (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan), and a third was at the FWBSF, *Okaloosa*, 20 May (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan, Sam Tagatz, Cecil Brown, Chris Cameron). A male and a female found on Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 10 May (Ben Garmon; @ABRC) set the 21<sup>st</sup> record for Alabama.

**BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** – A bird that appeared at a feeder in Pensacola, *Escambia*, in late February departed 5 March (Jack Powell) (casual in the WP).

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