

## SUMMER SIGHTINGS (JUNE - JULY 2009)

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This report covers the period from June through July 2009 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. “@” = under review by; “ABRC” = Alabama Bird Records Committee; “BAS” = Birmingham Audubon Society; “BBS” = Breeding Bird Survey; “CR” = County Road; “m.ob.” = many observers; “NS” = National Seashore; “ph.” = photographed; “SBC” = Summer Bird Count; “SP” = State Park; “WP” = Western Panhandle of Florida (*Escambia*, *Okaloosa*, and *Santa Rosa* counties).

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** – Very rare in summer in the WP, one was at the Fort Walton Beach Spray Fields, *Okaloosa*, 28 July (Don Ware). Near Leighton, *Colbert*, observations were made as follows: Damien Simbeck saw two on 26 May, six males on 2 June, and a pair on 15 June, while Steve McConnell saw four on 30 May (rare/erratic breeder in Alabama).

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** – Near Leighton, *Colbert*, Damien Simbeck *et al.* saw two males and one female 26 May and three males 2 June (late record migrants for the Tennessee Valley, though the species has nested in the Valley).

**CANVASBACK** – A male lingered at Guntersville, *Marshall*, 10 June (Katie Hanson) (late record for the Tennessee Valley, with one prior summer record of an injured bird).

**RING-NECKED DUCK** – Near Leighton, *Colbert*, a single was noted 4 May – 26 July+ (Damien Simbeck, Steve McConnell *et al.*) (rare in summer).

**SURF SCOTER** – On Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, a male and a female were present 6 June (Howard Horne, Tom Siegwald, Joan Siegwald) to mark the second June record for Alabama.

**HOODED MERGANSER** – A single was at the fish hatchery in Marion, *Perry*, 28 July (James Douglas, Tommy Pratt, m.ob.) (rare breeder).

**COMMON LOON** – Rare but regular in summer, three records (all of singles) were received: McDuffie Island, *Mobile*, 6 June (Stuart Fisher); Marion Junction quad,

*Dallas* SBC, 18 June (Frank Farrell); and one with an injured foot at Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 24 May (Chazz Hesselein), 27 May (Sharon Foster), and 29 June (Mary Porter) (ph.).

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** – This species is a rare breeder in Alabama, so singles at the Mobile Botanical Gardens, *Mobile*, 27 June (Chazz Hesselein), and west of Florence, *Lauderdale*, 25 July (Larry Barkey) were noteworthy.

**AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER** – Casual in the WP, one was seen in *Walton* 30 July (David Simpson).

**WILSON'S STORM-PETREL** – Expected offshore in summer, one was found 73 nautical miles SSW of Perdido Pass, *Baldwin*, 20 June (Steve McConnell, m.ob.; ph.).

**BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL** – Expected offshore in summer, five were counted between 67.6 and 73.0 nautical miles SSW of Perdido Pass, *Baldwin*, on a 20 June pelagic trip (Steve McConnell, m.ob.; ph.; @ABRC) (ninth record for Alabama).



Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, 20 June 2009, Baldwin County, Kathy Hicks.

**STORM-PETREL SP.** – Two unidentified birds were noted 64.5 and 67.6 nautical miles SSW of Perdido Pass, *Baldwin*, 20 June pelagic trip (Steve McConnell, m.ob.) (expected offshore in summer).

**NORTHERN GANNET** – Rare but regular in summer, several sightings came from the Fort Morgan Peninsula, *Baldwin*: one on 7 June and two on 14 June (Michael Jordan), and five on 5 July (Kathy Hicks).

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** – Erratic in summer on the Gulf Coast, 62 were reported from Blakeley Island, *Mobile*, 12 July (Chazz Hesselein).

**ANHINGA** – One was seen at Saginaw, *Shelby*, 20 July (Maureen Shaffer, John Swan, Anne Miller) (rare in Mountain Region; continuation at this site and possibly breeding).

**LEAST BITTERN** – Rare and local in the Tennessee Valley, one was at the Intergraph wetland, *Madison*, *Madison*, 7 July (Dean Cutten).

**GREAT EGRET** – Damien Simbeck counted 119 on 14 July near Leighton, *Colbert*, and Dwight Cooley topped this with 150 on 28 July at Wheeler NWR, *Morgan* (good numbers for the Tennessee Valley in summer).

**SNOWY EGRET** – A single was found at the Pell City sod farm, *St. Clair*, 10 July (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson) (rare but regular in summer in the Mountain Region). Also rare but regular in summer in the Tennessee Valley, Steve McConnell *et al.* found two on 12 July and five (good number for recent years) on 26 July in the Leighton/Muscle Shoals area, *Colbert*; Dwight Cooley noted one at Wheeler NWR, *Morgan*, 28 July.

**REDDISH EGRET** – Rare in summer in the WP, three white morph and four dark morph birds were at Opal Beach, Gulf Islands NS, *Escambia*, 8 June – 27 July (Bob Duncan).

**CATTLE EGRET** – Tom Haggerty located 15 west of Florence, *Lauderdale*, 15 June (locally rare in June).

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** – Twenty-five, a maximum for the Mountain Region, were at Neely Henry Dam, *St. Clair/Calhoun*, 10 June (Maureen Shaffer).

**WHITE IBIS** – Rare in the Tennessee Valley, records from two sites were received:

Muscle Shoals/Leighton area, *Colbert*, five on 22 July (Damien Simbeck) and three 28-29 July (Damien Simbeck, Maureen Shaffer *et al.*), and Wheeler NWR, *Morgan*, a single on 28 July (Dwight Cooley).

**ROSEATE SPOONBILL** – One was on Santa Rosa Island, *Okaloosa*, 17 June (Dustin Varble) to mark the seventh record for the WP.

**WOOD STORK** – The second June record for the WP was marked by a single in northern *Walton*, 28 June (Bob Reid). Rare but increasing in the Tennessee Valley, Dwight Cooley reported a juvenile from Wheeler NWR, *Morgan*, 28 July.

**OSPREY** – A survey of Lake Guntersville, *Marshall*, 22-28 June (Jerry Green *et al.*; ph.) found four active nests and a total of 24 birds, a maximum inland and summer count for Alabama.



Osprey, 22 June 2009, Lake Guntersville, AL; Jerry Green.

**SWALLOW-TAILED KITE** – Thirty was a good number in *Okaloosa*, 9 July (Michael Stephen). Charles Kennedy *et al.* counted 15 at Forest Home, *Butler*, 2 June (a good number for June, especially in this area). Along CR 21 southeast of Autaugaville, *Autauga*, good numbers were found 20 July (50+; John Law, Rod Douglas) and 28 July (48; Tommy Pratt, m.ob.). The previous maximum for Alabama was 60+, and aerial surveys along the Alabama-Tombigbee river area by Eric Soehren *et al.* exceeded this number by a large margin: 75 on 19 July, 256 on 22 July, and 196 on 25 July.

**MISSISSIPPI KITE** – An estimated 135 at Forest Home, *Butler*, 2 June (Charles Kennedy *et al.*) established a new maximum for Alabama. Two were seen along AL 17 north of Florence, *Lauderdale*, 8 June (Jud Johnston) (rare in northwest Alabama).

**AMERICAN KESTREL** – This falcon is an uncommon and local breeder in Alabama, and reports of singles from five sites were received: south of Houston, *Winston*, 4 June (Larry Barkey); Harvest, *Madison*, 8 June (Kim Upper, Pamela Upper); Steele quad, *St. Clair* SBC, 20 June (David George, Sharon Hudgins); Pell City sod farm, *St. Clair*, 10 July (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson); and Huntsville, *Madison*, 22 July (Edward Woodruff).

**AMERICAN COOT** – Rare in summer in Alabama, five were observed on Lady Ann Lake, *Madison*, 25 June (Dean Cutten), and a single was seen north of Uniontown, *Perry*, 25 July (Greg Harber, BAS).

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** – This species is rare in summer, and it can be difficult to say if birds seen in this season are summering or early fall migrants; nevertheless, three+ were seen on the west end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 3 July (Howard Horne, Tom Siegwald, Joan Siegwald).

**SNOWY PLOVER** – It was another banner year for this species, which nested throughout Santa Rosa Island, *Santa Rosa/Okaloosa*. Breeding success can be attributed to a combination of factors including creation of suitable nesting habitat by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, efforts by Gulf Islands NS personnel to limit human disturbance, and lack of recent storms. As of July, 100 nests were counted in the Fort Pickens section alone, in addition to birds already fledged (*vide* Mark Nicholas, Vicky Withington).

- WILSON'S PLOVER** – Due to favorable breeding conditions described above under Snowy Plover, it was also a very good year for this species, which nested only sporadically and in very small numbers in previous years. On 25 June, Bob Duncan and Lucy Duncan counted 19 birds in the Opal Beach, *Escambia*, and Navarre Beach, *Santa Rosa*, areas, the maximum counted in recent years.
- SEMPALMATED PLOVER** – Near Leighton, *Colbert*, two late migrants were seen 31 May (Milton Harris) and 2 June (Damien Simbeck). One seen on the west end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 3 July (Howard Horne, Tom Siegwald, Joan Siegwald) marked the earliest July record for Alabama (but unknown if summering or early migrant). A single west of Florence, *Lauderdale*, 12 July (Tom Haggerty) marked an early record for inland Alabama.
- WILLET** – Two birds seen west of Florence, *Lauderdale*, 5 July (Tom Haggerty) were early (and rare for inland Alabama).
- UPLAND SANDPIPER** – A sighting of one south of Magnolia Springs, *Baldwin*, 18 June (David Plumb) provided the fifth June record for Alabama (also seen 6 July).
- MARBLED GODWIT** – Casual in July in the WP, a single was at Fort Pickens, *Escambia*, 2 July (Patrick James).
- RUDDY TURNSTONE** – One seen on the west end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 3 July (Howard Horne, Tom Siegwald, Joan Siegwald) was either a rare summering bird or an early migrant.
- SANDERLING** – An estimated 50 on the west end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 3 July (Howard Horne, Tom Siegwald, Joan Siegwald) was a good number for this date (uncommon in summer).
- WESTERN SANDPIPER** – Two found on the west end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 3 July (Howard Horne, Tom Siegwald, Joan Siegwald) marked the earliest July record for Alabama (but unknown if summering or early migrant).
- WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER** – A late record for the Mountain Region was provided by a single at the Pell City sod farm, *St. Clair*, 15 June (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson).
- BAIRD'S SANDPIPER** – One was spotted near Leighton, *Colbert*, 9 June (Milton Harris, Bert Harris) (late record for inland Alabama).
- SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** – Two+ were found on the west end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 3 July (Howard Horne, Tom Siegwald, Joan Siegwald) (unknown if summering or early migrant). Uncommon in the Tennessee Valley, three were early near Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 12 July (Steve McConnell), and four were at Wheeler NWR, *Morgan*, 28 July (Dwight Cooley).
- LAUGHING GULL** – A juvenile was at Lake Purdy, *Jefferson*, 22 July (Greg Jackson, Debra Jackson), and marked the second July record for the Mountain Region. This species is rare inland, especially without storm activity.
- HERRING GULL** – Near Leighton, *Colbert*, one was seen 30 May (Steve McConnell) and 2 June (Damien Simbeck) (rare in June for inland Alabama).
- HERRING GULL X KELP GULL** – Two adults of this probable hybrid, not definitely known from Alabama, were seen on Gaillard Island, *Mobile*, 17-26 June (Roger Clay)

*et al.*; ph.).

- SOOTY TERN** – Evidence for the second year of definite nesting in Alabama came from the west end of Dauphin Island, *Mobile*: three nests with eggs on 11 June (Roger Clay) and two birds on 4 July (Steve McConnell; see cover photograph).
- LEAST TERN** – It was another great year for breeding birds at Gulf Islands NS, *Escambia*, where 243 chicks were counted 8 June (*fide* Mark Nicholas, Vicky Withington). As of 8 July, many chicks and juveniles were still present.
- GULL-BILLED TERN** – One to three pairs nested in the Least Tern colony at Fort Pickens, Gulf Islands NS, *Escambia*, 15 June – 8 July (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan) (new nesting location for this species).
- ARCTIC TERN** – The second record for the WP was established by one seen at Opal Beach, Gulf Islands NS, *Escambia*, 27 July (Bob Duncan, Lucy Duncan; ph.).
- BLACK SKIMMER** – This species finally abandoned its traditional nesting site on the busy Navarre Beach Causeway and joined the Least Terns inside the protected area of Santa Rosa Island, Gulf Islands NS, *Escambia*. Two colonies, one in the Opal Beach area and the other in the Fort Pickens section, both appear to be enjoying success, with numerous young present as of 8 July (Bob Duncan).
- WHITE-WINGED DOVE** – Increasing as a breeder, a single was at a new site in west Mobile, *Mobile*, 5 July (Chazz Hesselein).
- LOVEBIRD SP.** – Two of these exotics were at the feeder of Jesse Knothe, Fort Walton Beach, *Okaloosa*, 6 July (*fide* Bob Duncan).
- BARN OWL** – Rarely detected in summer or breeding, records were received from five sites: one along AL 157 two miles northwest of AL 36, *Lawrence*, 7 June (Steve McConnell); four at Scant City, *Marshall*, 9 June (Matt Morrow); one at Blakeley Island, *Mobile*, 13 June (Chazz Hesselein); one found dead at Enterprise, *Coffee*, 2 July (Damien Simbeck); and another single found dead at Kilpatrick, *DeKalb*, 9 July (Scott Gravette *et al.*).
- CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW** – Nests of this species are rarely discovered, but Bill Summerour found one in Gulf Shores, *Baldwin*, that contained one egg on 1 June and two eggs on 2 June (ph.).
- CHIMNEY SWIFT** – For the sixth consecutive year, this species nested in the Duncan's chimney in Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*. Nest building began in early June, robust young were heard as of 8 July, and the young fledged by late July.
- HAIRY WOODPECKER** – Very rare in the WP, one was noted on the Tarkiln Bayou Trail, *Escambia*, 6 June (Eva Barnett, Michael Jordan, Cheryl Bunch).
- WILLOW FLYCATCHER** – Two singing birds that were probably nesting were recorded at Hartselle, *Morgan*, 6-27 June (Scott Gravette) (only one confirmed nesting in Alabama).
- GRAY KINGBIRD** – Nesting was reported from five different areas in the WP (*fide* Bob Duncan).
- SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER** – This species is a rare but increasing breeder in Alabama, and was reported from six sites: one at the airport in Meridianville, *Madison*,

12 June (Milton Harris); a male from a new site, six miles north of Safford, *Dallas*, 12 June (Barry Fleming) and 21 June (Larry Gardella) (probably nesting); one at the intersection of AL 25 and CR 9 (new site), *Hale*, 3 July (Greg Harber, Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton); a pair with two young at Sledge, *Hale*, 3 July (Greg Harber, Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton); a pair north of Uniontown, *Perry*, 3 July (Greg Harber, Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton) and presumably the same pair with four young at the same site 25 July (Greg Harber, BAS); and one at the Alabama A&M farm, *Madison*, 22 July (Edward Woodruff).

**BLUE-HEADED VIREO** – One was found in the Hyatt Gap quad, *St. Clair* SBC, 14 June (Greg Harber, Jessica Germany) (first possible breeding record for the county, very rare summer resident near Birmingham). Seventeen, including 12 immatures, were counted on a 30-stop route at Cheaha SP, *Cleburne*, 16 July (Derek Muschalek).

**FISH CROW** – The *St. Clair* SBC produced two records: two in the Laniers quad, 13 June (Andrew Haffenden), and one in the Steele quad, 20 June (David George, Sharon Hudgins) (locally rare but increasing). Larry Barkey reported one from south of Houston, *Winston*, 21 June – 7 July (rare this far north but increasing). Rare but increasing in the Tennessee Valley, one was at Guntersville Dam, *Marshall*, 3 July (Matt Morrow), one was in the Town Creek Marsh area, *Colbert*, 12 July (Steve McConnell), and one was at Decatur, *Morgan*, 23 July (Steve McConnell).

**TREE SWALLOW** – This species is a rare but increasing breeder in Alabama, and reports from six sites were received: one at White Oak on the Vina BBS, *Franklin*, 7 June (Steve McConnell) (new site if breeding); two at Canoe Creek on the Odenville BBS, *St. Clair*, 7 June (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent) (new site); three-four pairs nesting in Purple Martin houses, Poplar Creek, *Limestone*, 9 June (Milton Harris, Bert Harris) (new site); four in the Pell City quad, *St. Clair* SBC, 14 June (Stan Hamilton, Dana Hamilton); five in the Hyatt Gap quad, *St. Clair* SBC, 14 June (Greg Harber, Jessica Germany); and a pair and two young in the Wattsville quad, *St. Clair* SBC, 20 June (Greg Jackson) (new site).

**CLIFF SWALLOW** – One at Opal Beach, Gulf Islands NS, *Escambia*, 8 July (Bob Duncan) was the earliest ever (by 11 days) fall migrant for the WP.

**BARN SWALLOW** – Five nests were noted at Opal Beach, Gulf Islands NS, *Escambia*, 17-25 June (Bob Duncan) (new nesting location).

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** – The first confirmed record for Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, was marked by one seen by Eugenia Carey *et al.* (ph.) 19-26 July.

**HOUSE WREN** – A pair and a dependent fledgling were seen in the Hyatt Gap quad, *St. Clair* SBC, 13 June (Greg Harber, Jessica Germany), and one was singing at Clay, *Jefferson*, 10-15 July (Bob Sargent, Martha Sargent) (rare breeder in Alabama).

**AMERICAN ROBIN** – Johnny Green reported nesting at a traditional site in north Pensacola, *Escambia*. One present in Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 7 June was unusual for the location (Bob Duncan). Reports



Carolina Chickadee, 19 July 2009, Dauphin Island, AL; Eugenia Carey.



were also received of birds in Niceville and Fort Walton Beach, *Okaloosa*, 7-17 June (Pat Baker) (very local breeder on WP).

**CEDAR WAXWING** – Breeding was documented at Steele, *St. Clair*, with the observation of nest building 23 July and three young in this nest 20 August (Jody Gilliland, Bill Gilliland) (rare but expanding breeder).

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** – The first June record for *Madison* was marked by a singing bird at Monte Sano SP 26 June (Milton Harris, Bert Harris). Forty-six, including 29 immatures, was a good summer number on a 30-stop route at Cheaha SP, *Cleburne*, 16 July (Derek Muschalek).

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** – A singing male tarried at Fort Morgan, *Baldwin*, 14 June (Michael Jordan *et al.*) (late record for south Alabama).

**CERULEAN WARBLER** – Two singing males and a female were along Larkin Fork, *Jackson*, 6 June (Dean Cutten, Raelene Cutten) (rare breeder, continuation at this site). Two singing males, an adult female, and a probable juvenile were reported from Monte Sano SP, *Madison*, 26 June – 10 July (Milton Harris, Bert Harris *et al.*) (first probable local nesting since 1960).

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** – The first June record for the WP was provided by a female at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 6 June (Bob Duncan). Twenty-four were tallied on a 30-stop route at Cheaha SP, *Cleburne*, 16 July (Derek Muschalek) (maximum summer count for inland Alabama).

**WORM-EATING WARBLER** – A singing bird was detected in the Elm Bluff quad, *Dallas* SBC, 6 June (Larry Gardella) (rare on the Inland Coastal Plain).

**SWAINSON'S WARBLER** – Rare in the Tennessee Valley, one was heard singing along Little Bear Creek (CR 23, just west of AL 247) on the Vina BBS, *Franklin*, 7 June (Steve McConnell).

**LARK SPARROW** – One at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa*, 10 July (Bob Duncan) was the earliest ever (by 15 days) fall migrant for the WP.

**SONG SPARROW** – Singles were noted at Leeds, *Jefferson*, 10 June (Harriett Wright, Ann Miller), and at Roebuck, *Jefferson*, 23 July (Harriett Wright, Mary Lou Miller) (locally rare breeder).

**ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK** – A second-year male was at a feeder in Dothan, *Houston*, 27 May – 1 June (Sharon Montefusco; ph.) (ties late record for Alabama).

**PAINTED BUNTING** – This species is a rare but increasing breeder. An adult male was singing along CR 135 near CR 21, southeast of Autaugaville, *Autauga*, 7 June (John Trent).

**DICKCISSEL** – David George found one in the Steele quad, *St. Clair* SBC, 14 June (locally rare).

**NUTMEG MANNIKIN** – This introduced species continues to be reported from the usual areas in Pensacola, *Escambia*. Adults and juveniles were reported from the Milton area, *Santa Rosa*, 15 June (Heidi Moore) (new site).

**PIN-TAILED WHYDAH** – Bob Duncan has four WP records of this escapee, the latest being a pair in east Pensacola, *Escambia*, 13 June (Patrick James), and a female in southwest

# ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

Pensacola, 3 July (Ann Forster).

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