

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 35, NO. 1 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPRING 2015

...to foster a greater knowledge of birds and to promote conservation of all natural resources

FOUNDED 1952



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LOUISE ZEMAITIS

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HI FOLKS. HOPE Y'ALL ARE having a nice winter season, full of cool birds and at least reasonably mild weather from time to time. We've had one or two quite frigid North Alabama Birdwatchers Society (NABS) trips up here this past January, especially the Guntersville trip the week before the AOS meeting. It was 15° F when we got started that morning, which was bad enough but, unexpectedly, there was a quite significant "breeze" coming off the lake. I thought I was well wrapped up but that was as cold as I have been in a long time, especially my feet and hands. Being birders, we persevered and made it through the first brutal hour or so, during which we saw some pretty nice birds. By the time we were done, temperatures were in the 30s and the breeze was gone; it felt almost balmy.

First off, let me thank all of you who attended the AOS winter meeting at Joe Wheeler State Park. The meeting went quite well (albeit with a minor glitch or two to spice things up a bit). We had some really nice field trips, especially once the weather started to cooperate. We were able to have two pelagic trips; the first one was very cold and not especially productive, the second one much better, yielding a White-winged Scoter for prize bird. I want to thank Damien Simbeck for making arrangements for and leading these unique excursions for us; also a special thank you to Captain Steve Graham for the use of his time, boat, and expertise in piloting it. It was great to meet and see you at the banquet.

Rufina and I opted for the Waterloo trip along the Tennessee River on Saturday, led by Paul Kittle, and the local trip to the park, Wheeler and Wilson dams, and Town Creek marsh, led by Harry Dean, on Sunday. Both were great outings, the Waterloo trip highlighted by several eagles, many goldeneyes, a Red-breasted Nuthatch (thanks, Damien, for keying in Paul on where to find him) and White-crowned Sparrows. One thing I learned from Dr. Kittle that I did not know before was that white-crowns are partial to hedge and fence rows containing multi-flora rose. We also observed an unusual phenomenon as we watched a dozen or so of the sparrows feeding in the unpaved road that ran along the



edge of a farm fence row. They were in the shade, with a bit of sunlight dappled in. When a sparrow moved into the area where the sunlight mixed in, at a certain angle of view, it took on a strikingly blue hue; it was pretty amazing and observed by most of the group. Thanks, Paul, for leading us on such a nice outing; we all had a great time.

Our local trip on Sunday was really nice too, but what stood out for me was the parking area below Wilson Dam, which now has a paved sort of greenway, leading past the caves and waterfall that many of you are familiar with, as you go toward the dam. It was just gorgeous

there, more water than I have ever seen before, with Winter Wrens frolicking along the waterfront. Really memorable; thanks much, Harry, for your efforts in making this outing so much fun.

From what I heard, the trip to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge was exceptional, with Dwight Cooley, refuge manager and our banquet speaker, leading the way and conducting a workshop while there. I understand at least a couple of the Whooping Cranes visiting the refuge were seen, and the diversity of ducks and geese there this time of year is impressive. Dwight, we really appreciate your excellent and informative presentation covering some history of Wheeler NWR, along with information on its management, as well as population trends of cranes, pelicans, ducks and geese through the years on the refuge. This is always a fascinating subject for me and, as evidenced by all of the questions your talk generated, others as well. Thanks much for your time and efforts in making our meeting successful.

Otherwise, as always, we really appreciate the Joe Wheeler State Park staff for their hospitality and support in making our meeting a success. Thanks, also, to Rufina for her efforts during registration and for the help she got from Jane Allen and Berta Pylant; it's much appreciated. Finally, thanks to Anne and Maureen for pulling together some meeting information for the website, which helped us advertise things a little better. We hope to continue that in the future, maybe getting the information out a bit earlier than we were able to do this time around.

The spring AOS meeting will be held April 17-19 at Dauphin Island Sea Lab. I should mention again that no lodging at DISL will be available for AOS attendees; detailed lodging information is available on page 15 of this issue of *The Yellowhammer*. Because Discovery Day is being held on a different weekend this year we are actually going to have access to the Shelby Center for the Friday mixer/student presentation/slide show and both the board meeting and banquet on Saturday. A detailed schedule of events appears on page 15 of this issue of *The Yellowhammer*.

Our banquet speaker this spring will be Louise Zemaitis. Louise is an artist and naturalist living in Cape May, New Jersey, where she is a popular field trip leader teaching birding workshops as an associate naturalist with New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory. Farther afield, she travels extensively, leading for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours and to birding festivals where she is known for her enthusiasm for all natural history subjects. Louise will talk about birding as it relates to habitat and has graciously agreed to lead one of our field trips. More information on Louise is available on page 14 of this issue of *The Yellowhammer*.

I am going to close by doing a bit of shameless promotion of a northern Alabama birding spot that is dear to my heart and, I feel, bears more exposure. Many of you are at least aware of the Winfred Thomas Agricultural Research Station (WTARS), better known as Alabama A&M University's research farm. WTARS has been a stop on the North Alabama Birding Trail since its inception. It is a 900-acre farm that straddles US Highway 431 just south of Hazel Green, which is roughly a dozen miles north of Huntsville, within a few miles of the Tennessee state line. It is one of the best places in the state to observe open country birds, including several species of conservation concern. Species typically encountered that breed on the property include Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Grasshopper Sparrow, Dickcissel, Lark Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Kingbird, Horned Lark, Northern Bobwhite, Loggerhead Shrike and a variety of others. Bobolinks usually show up during migration and some unusual birds have been encountered, including Wilson's Phalarope, Laughing Gull, American Avocet (!), etc. NABS has led a popular trip to the property every year since the early 2000s. I'd like to encourage all of you to consider joining us on our outings there in early May and consider the possibility of bringing groups up here at other times. Even though access

to the property can be tricky on the weekends (due to lack of parking and locked gates), WTARS is technically open to the public then, and a visit can be facilitated by communicating in advance an interest in such (I can help with that). There is a good chance, in the near future, that some of the accessibility issues will be resolved and that the property will be further enhanced for bird observation (via wetlands construction). In the meantime, anyone interested in visiting the farm from a distance on a weekend can contact me (email or phone) and I'll see what I can do. During the week, the farm is open between 8 am and 3 pm, if you'd like to visit then.

Looking forward to seeing y'all at the AOS spring meeting; Happy Birding.

Tennessee Ornithological Society Centennial

WE'RE HAVING A BIRTHDAY! I AM EXTENDING A CORDIAL invitation to all our neighboring state bird clubs to join us for a fun-filled weekend this coming April 30 – May 3, 2015. Our celebration will be held at the Montgomery Bell State Park (1000 Hotel Avenue) in Burns, Tennessee, which is only about 20 miles west of Nashville. We have reserved the entire 3,800-acre park for the weekend. The highlight Saturday evening after the banquet will be a film put together by one of our members detailing our entire 100-year history, complete with photos and interviews with some of the members. We will have short programs on Friday afternoon and field trips on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings. Everyone is welcome! See the details below for further information and registration forms. Early registration is urged to help our planning committee with logistics. Information and registration can be found at: www.tnbirds.org/Events/Springmtg15.html.

—Ron Hoff, President, Tennessee Ornithological Society

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Summer 2015	May 30, 2015
Fall 2015	August 10, 2015
Winter 2015	November 10, 2015

On Their Own Turf

EVERY SPRING MY WIFE PAT and I head to Dauphin Island, Alabama, for the migration spectacle. Millions of birds launch themselves northward across the Gulf of Mexico and next set foot on solid ground on the United States Gulf Coast. The concentration of birds is breathtaking, especially during a fallout, when the birds run into adverse winds or other weather conditions and are forced to touch down at the first possible place—in Alabama, either Dauphin Island or the Fort Morgan Peninsula.

Birding at migrant traps is fantastic. The birds simply drop out of the sky and pose in front of your binoculars. They are often tired from their long, arduous journey, and they are fairly approachable as long as you keep your motions easy and smooth. It is so much easier than looking way up through several layers of foliage, to get glimpses of a warbler that normally stays in the tops of very tall trees. Perhaps the best part is that a birder can see many more species per hour than anywhere else.

But when you leave the migrant trap, what do you have? You have some memories of truly beautiful birds, seen at extremely close range. You had, if you took the time to avail yourself of it, a golden opportunity to sharpen your identification skills by viewing the birds so closely. You have an impressive list of names for your monthly or annual list. And finally, you have seen birds that you may otherwise have no real chance of seeing short of spending megabucks traveling



to several different states, and risking Lyme disease and other maladies.

But, do you know the birds? Do you know where they live? Their particular needs? I am not against birding migrant traps; I will continue to do so as long as there is habitat left. But I would suggest that to really experience a bird, it's better to see it on its breeding grounds, in the bird's own environment. Seeing a bird on its breeding ground often takes much more awareness of the bird and its habitat requirements. One must consider things from a bird's eye view. One must be quiet. One must be observant. One must work a little harder

for each bird. The observer of a bird in its territory must do so on the bird's terms.

Birds are not handed to you on a silver platter. For instance,

you must go to two totally different areas to see, say, a Prothonotary Warbler and a Cerulean Warbler. Before successfully looking for a Prothonotary Warbler, you may learn that they like wooded swamps, dense, damp under-story, or banks of slow-moving creeks, particularly those prone to flooding. You will want to learn something about their vocalizations so that you can readily discern them from other calls. You will learn to expect them low to the ground, rarely more than 20 feet up. You will need to research where you can find such habitat with public access. Finally, you have to get there. That may be a five-minute drive to a convenient bridge, or it may be a bit farther.

However, if your quarry is a Cerulean Warbler, the locating may be a bit



more daunting. You will have a decidedly different habitat to find. Once you pinpoint the proper habitat of mature, unbroken, deciduous forest, you may have to drive several hours, hike a few more, and you may have to gain permission to enter the property. Again, you will want to know what the bird sounds like, because the closest you may get to a Cerulean Warbler is 60 to 80 feet, most of it vertical. Of course, the challenges are greater for birds that do not breed near your home, or even within hundreds of miles.

The point is that you will have to know each bird much better before you can reasonably hope to see the bird in its normal habitat. It follows that if you are going to this much trouble to see a bird, your goal is going to be slightly more than a tick mark on a list. You may want to spend some time determining its foraging technique, what it eats, the size of territory it defends, or perhaps trying to find a nest. There will be a reason for the effort.

So why bother? What reward can you expect for so much effort? There, on their own turf, watching them defending their territory, courting, and raising their young, there is a sense of intimacy, of some secret shared between friends. This feeling is not often possible during migration. You will gain an awareness of the bird and what makes it tick, of the challenges it faces to survive in an increasingly difficult world. You may even discover some fact, large or small, that adds to our knowledge of the bird.

There are side benefits of going to the bird. One of them is good outdoor exercise in some of the more scenic parts of the world. Another is the opportunity to encounter other species, such as reptiles, mammals, and countless flora, all in their natural setting.

So, migrant traps are wonderful, and there's nothing wrong with enjoying them, but don't forget the rewards of birds the other eight or so months of the year. You will be richer for it.

Membership Dues

YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRES ON DECEMBER 31 OF THE YEAR printed on your mailing label of this issue. In recent issues of *The Yellowhammer*, I have urged you to check to see if your AOS membership is current. If you are not current, please renew. We want to keep all our friends as members.

You can also help us by spreading the word about AOS to any of your friends who share the goals that AOS has espoused since its founding in 1952. There are two: fostering a greater knowledge of birds and promoting conservation of all natural resources.

Finally, I ask for suggestions from any or all of you on the best ways to reach out to people who want to learn more about birds. You can email me directly at lgardellabirds@charter.net or put your suggestions on the Albirds listserv. Either way, I would love to hear from you.

—Larry Gardella

Have You Read a Good Bird Book Lately?

IF YOU HAVE READ A GOOD BIRD BOOK LATELY, PLEASE TELL US about it. It doesn't have to be about birds exclusively, but about conservation, nature in general, or other related topics. I'm not looking for a review, necessarily, but just recommendations of good books you've run across. Let the rest of us know, so we can read them too.

New Members

Erskine Ashbee
 Mike Carson & Susan Baum
 Pat Brackin
 Angela Carn
 Vicki & David Dodd
 Doris Gertler
 Joe & Joan Guinn
 Martha Jenks
 Lydia R. Johnson
 Kay Kinnear
 Melissa Kirkindall
 Tab Choate & Rebekah Martin
 Mary Maxwell
 Joseph Miller
 Miriam Rueger
 Gloria & Sam Slick
 Sarah Smith
 Cindy & Jim Stanfield
 Linda & James Wakefield
 Caroline & Sean Wellesley

JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, JANUARY 23-25, 2015

Winter Meeting Report

By BOB REED

EDITOR'S NOTE: Greg Harber, who normally does our trip report, was unable to this time, so several folks pitched in to give us this entertaining account. I owe special thanks to Jane Allen, who honchoed much of this.



OS MET AT JOE WHEELER STATE PARK FOR THE winter meeting January 23-25, 2015. Northwest Alabama is wonderfully rich for birders, and Ken and others organized some excellent field trips. The showcase of the region is the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, managed by our own Dwight Cooley. The entire west Alabama portion of the Tennessee River is the winter haunt to cranes, ducks, geese, eagles, sparrows, and many other species of birds.

The weekend started Friday afternoon with a very cold and wet (and abbreviated) boat ride that left the Joe Wheeler State Park marina on board the *Nautical Wheeler*, captained by Steve Graham. Jane Allen described it this way:

"We left the dock, slowly through the mist and fog, five intrepid birders, some wrapped so that only their eyes were visible. In shades of soft gray and charcoal, we moved slowly through the water, scaring the American Coots. We were surrounded by a swirling flock of white Bonaparte's Gulls, swooping and diving. It is an achromatic scene. As we meandered toward the channel there were dark Double-crested Cormorants and startling American White Pelicans. The riverbanks were softened with mist. As we reached the Wheeler Dam, we tossed out bread to attract the Ring-billed Gulls and maybe a curious, rare gull. Our captain backed up the boat so the birds followed us, diving for the bread. Our return was uneventful. We struggled with the cold and wet, glad to reach the dock again. The captain expertly docked the boat in a blowing wind."

That night we were treated to several slide presentations from members, and two brief presentations by students reporting on how they used funds provided by the Dan C. Holliman Fund.

Saturday, groups went to Joe Wheeler NWR led by Dwight Cooley, to Waterloo, Alabama and Key Cave NWR, led by Dr. Paul Kittle, and a third group, led by Damien Simbeck, went back out on the Tennessee River on board the *Nautical Wheeler*.

Jane Allen went on the Joe Wheeler NWR trip and described it: "About a dozen birders convened at the refuge Visitor Center. Immediately, we could hear and see the Sandhill Cranes flying into Flint Creek Island from their roosting areas. Their call is unmistakable. We watched the pond and adjoining fields from the Observation Center, an incredible view. Thousands of cranes eventually settled in, eating and dancing. Dwight began his scan of the pond, looking for a variety of ducks and geese. Fortunately, he found a Redhead Duck at the far northwest corner. It was diving and only visible for seconds at a time. He and others noted 75 Greater White-fronted Geese, three Snow Geese, three Canada Goose hybrids, Sandhill Cranes (about 3,000), and a variety of ducks (4,000). The group then moved on to Garth Slough, where Whooping Cranes were known to be. There they were!! Two groups of three and one pair were seen flying away from 'Suzy Hole' as we approached. It is a thrill just to see them, as rare as they are. An immature Bald Eagle lit on a sandbar.

"We left Morgan County for Limestone County where we stopped at Arrowhead Landing on Limestone Bay. We scoped both Snow Geese (about 2,500) and a variety of ducks (2,000) far across the bay. On we went behind the gates to hunt for a Rough-legged Hawk seen by Dwight Cooley on a refuge waterfowl count some time earlier. It's a great thing to be able to drive to this hawk area as it is a 3/4-mile walk to get there (underneath the north end of the I-65 Bridge). Immediately, immature Bald Eagles were seen circling one another high above us, four in all. They were of various ages; one was totally white on its belly, a new sight for me. Four Red-tailed Hawks were noted, varying in size and color. One on its front resembled a Rough-legged Hawk. We waited patiently to see

if it might fly. Yes it did! Another Red-tailed Hawk! Some disappointment was felt all around. This wetland area also supports a significant duck population, about 4,000 that day. While others checked the distant trees for hawks, one Northern Harrier was seen, and others teased out sparrows nearby. What a terrific day! Such rare sights here on the refuge along the Tennessee River."

Dana Hamilton picks up the story: "Dr. Paul Kittle expertly led an extremely successful field trip to Waterloo. It began with a pair of Red-tailed Hawks, one carrying nesting material. On the road to Waterloo, a farm pond held a small group of Hooded Mergansers. When we stopped to scan the gravel bars near Waterloo, we were treated to a perched Bald Eagle with a fish. As we walked to the shoreline, we saw another Bald Eagle perched on a snag in the opposite direction. From the gravel bar area, we also saw Buffleheads and Killdeer. As we returned to our cars, we were treated to nice views of an Orange-crowned Warbler, a Hermit Thrush, American Goldfinch, and both Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets mixed in with many White-throated Sparrows and Carolina Wrens.

"As we continued along the river's edge, an immature Bald Eagle left the perch and appeared to follow along beside the caravan. We stopped to scope the backwater at the picnic area on Second Creek, locating Canvasbacks, Lesser Scaup, Common Golden-eye, Horned Grebes, and Great Egrets. At the waterfront in downtown Waterloo, we saw several Common Loons close to the shore. Next, Dr. Kittle led us to a wooded spot in search of Red-breasted Nuthatch. The Red-breasted Nuthatch called and flew into view briefly. Carolina Wrens and more kinglets were also abundant there.

"Our next stop was off the Historic Natchez Trace at the Colbert Ferry Recreation Area. A pair of sunlit Red-headed Woodpeckers entertained us by flying back and forth between the ground and a bare tree trunk. Eastern Bluebirds were abundant as well. A mixed flock of songbirds included a Pine Warbler and a great view of a Brown Creeper directly in front of us! Scoping the Tennessee River, we saw a raft of approximately 140 Common Golden-eye.

"Working our way back through the farm and field areas, Dr. Kittle located a flock of at least 20 White-crowned Sparrows along a dirt road near the Key Cave NWR. Our final birding destination took us to a grassy field with a large flock of Horned Larks working a grassy field near an industrial

complex. Before adjourning, we enjoyed a delicious lunch at a small local cafe. After the board members departed for the board meeting, others were treated to Fox Sparrows."

Last, but not least, was the second boat ride. Ten people spent six hours on board the *Nautical Wheeler*. There were lots of Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls in First Creek in the park and along the Tennessee River to Wheeler Dam. After locking through Wheeler Dam, they saw Greater and Lesser Scaup (including some close looks at the Greaters) below the dam and around Hog Island (the Point). An immature Bald Eagle was seen over the open waters near Hog Island. One group of Greater Scaup below Wheeler Dam included a female White-winged Scoter. There were also numerous Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye and several American White Pelicans around Hog Island. Everyone was asked to bring a loaf of bread, and they fed the gulls above and below Wheeler Dam. As has been the case most of this winter, Ring-billed and Herring Gull numbers were low at both locations. We circled the island below Wheeler Dam and turned up three Black-crowned Night-Herons. The final destination was a run to Spring Creek, but nothing new showed up there. There was some excitement over a "California Gull," but a later look at some really good pictures of the gull confirmed that, despite bill color and a dirty nape, the yellow iris indicated Herring Gull, at least in part.

Saturday evening we enjoyed a delicious meal and an interesting presentation from Dwight Cooley about the history of bird activity at Joe Wheeler NWR, which started out as a winter haven for Canada Geese. However, in the past decade, Sandhill Cranes, and now a small flock of Whooping Cranes, have essentially replaced most of the geese. He also spoke about the management of the refuge for ducks, cranes and geese.

Sunday, Harry Dean led a more local field trip around the park, highlights of which were Virginia Rail, Winter Wrens, a Great Blue Heron rookery, Brown Creeper, Bonaparte's and Ring-billed Gulls, Wilson Snipe, Horned Grebes and several duck species.

At one point during the weekend, three dozen American White Pelicans were visible from the lodge.

The society tallied a total of 101 species for the weekend, and I heard nothing but wonderful comments from everyone, with the exception of the five Friday boaters. They were still too cold to talk.

*2015 AOS Winter Meeting Compilation List
Joe Wheeler State Park, January 23–25*

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF the winter meeting weekend included Whooping Crane.

Greater White-fronted
Goose

Snow Goose

Ross's Goose

Canada Goose

Gadwall

American Widgeon

Mallard

Northern Shoveler

Northern Pintail

Green-winged Teal

Canvasback

Redhead

Ring-necked Duck

Greater Scaup

Lesser Scaup

White-winged Scoter

Bufflehead

Common Goldeneye

Hooded Merganser

Ruddy Duck

Common Loon

Pied-billed Grebe

Horned Grebe

Double-crested
Cormorant

American White Pelican

Great Blue Heron

Great Egret

Black-crowned
Night-Heron

Black Vulture

Turkey Vulture

Bald Eagle

Northern Harrier

Cooper's Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

Virginia Rail

American Coot

Whooping Crane

Sandhill Crane

Killdeer

Wilson's Snipe

Bonaparte's Gull

Ring-billed Gull

Herring Gull

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Forster's Tern

Rock Pigeon

Eurasian Collared-Dove

Mourning Dove

Belted Kingfisher

Red-headed Woodpecker

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Downy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker

American Kestrel

Eastern Phoebe

Blue Jay

American Crow

Fish Crow

Horned Lark

Carolina Chickadee

Tufted Titmouse

Red-breasted Nuthatch

White-breasted Nuthatch

Brown-headed Nuthatch

Brown Creeper

Winter Wren

Carolina Wren

Golden-crowned Kinglet

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Eastern Bluebird

Hermit Thrush

American Robin

Brown Thrasher

Northern Mockingbird

European Starling

Cedar Waxwing

Orange-crowned Warbler

Pine Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Eastern Towhee

Chipping Sparrow

Field Sparrow

Savannah Sparrow

Fox Sparrow

Song Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow

White-throated Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

Northern Cardinal

Red-winged Blackbird

Eastern Meadowlark

Rusty Blackbird

Common Grackle

House Finch

Purple Finch

Pine Siskin

American Goldfinch

House Sparrow

All reported sightings will be accepted and published in *The Yellowhammer*. However, the meeting compilation list in *The Yellowhammer* is not an official record. Species that are **boldfaced**, or listed in the Hypothetical section of the AOS Field Card, must be supported by complete written details and submitted to, and accepted by, the Records Committee to become an official AOS record. *Italicized species* usually need written details but these may be brief. Out of season and locally rare birds should also be documented. Refer to the front page of the AOS Field Card for additional details.

JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, ALABAMA, JANUARY 24, 2015

Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By PAT REED, *Secretary*



HE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MET ON SATURDAY, January 24, 2015, at Joe Wheeler State Park, Alabama. President Ken Ward called the meeting to order.

OFFICER'S REPORTS

SECRETARY—Pat Reed stated corrections had been made to the October 11, 2014 minutes; however, the bullets pertaining to the Fort Morgan Management Plan were not removed as requested because there was substantive discussion on this matter. After discussion Larry Gardella moved the minutes be approved as presented. Stan Hamilton seconded the move and the minutes were approved.

TREASURER—Rufina Ward furnished a detailed financial report covering the period July through December 2014. This report indicated a balance of \$11,010.59 and total donations of \$5,633.48 as of December 31, 2014. Rufina reported nine new individual members and eight families for 2014. During discussion of the duration of membership it was noted the membership period is January through December.

VICE PRESIDENT—David Pylant reported there are very good computer software programs available for membership management that can be set up for access in several ways and suggested AOS look into purchasing such software. David agreed to look into this with the assistance of Ken and Rufina Ward. After discussion the board agreed this should be explored in order for AOS to share information and to make the treasurer's job somewhat easier.

David reported he was considering Five Rivers for the 2016 winter meeting. Eric stated the price for Delta Hall has increased. Lodging in the area was discussed. Eufaula (Lakepoint State Park) was suggested even though additional access to some areas had previously been denied. It was pointed out access is at the discretion of the refuge manager,

but there are several good areas to bird on the refuge. He requested input for winter meeting locations.

David requested assistance in filling Board positions beginning after the October meeting. He asked anyone interested in remaining in their current position to let him know, and should anyone chose to resign, to help with suggestions for others who might serve. It was the consensus that young people be encouraged to get more involved.

Rufina reported the receipt of a check from ALTelco Credit Union in the amount of \$26,311.92 for a CD that matured last year. She asked for instructions from the board as to how this check should be handled. During discussion it was pointed out the majority of this money is from life memberships and has restrictions on it. After further discussion, Bob Reed moved that Rufina Ward and David Pylant purchase a four-year CD for \$26,000.00 at an institution of their choice with both of them on the signature card. The move was seconded by Bianca Allen and unanimously approved by the Board.

PRESIDENT—Ken Ward reported the speaker for the spring meeting will be Louise Zemaitis, who is a tour leader/speaker from Cape May. There is a possibility she will do a workshop or lead a field trip. Her husband, Michael O'Brien, may join her during the weekend. The fall speaker will be Jon Dunn.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

CONSERVATION—Greg Harber reported not much had happened since the October meeting. The farm bill did pass and included money set aside for the Appalachian Highlands for habitat restoration for the Cerulean and Golden-winged Warblers.

Ken reported Scot Duncan is concerned about the Master Plan Development and Convention Center at Oak Mountain State Park. There is a new organization, Keep Oak Mountain Wild, formed by people concerned about the effect this development will have on Oak Mountain. A meeting is

scheduled for January 27, 2015, and Scot plans to attend. The board agreed AOS needs to have a presence and share information known about the park and special habitat areas that need to be protected.

Ken reported Elizabeth Condon, with the International Crane Foundation, had requested a meeting to discuss a partnership with AOS. Eric Soehren had also talked with Ms. Condon, stating she will be in Montgomery and Birmingham to meet with various groups. Her main emphasis is to reshape attitudes toward Whooping Cranes by reaching out to communities and providing educational programs for hunters and schools K-12. After discussion the board agreed Ken should meet with Ms. Condon, as this appears to be a good organization for AOS to be associated with; however, we need more information on exactly what she wants from us in the proposed partnership.

MEMBERSHIP—Larry Gardella reported membership is moving slower than planned; however, notice had been taken that one of the committee chairs has not renewed membership. It was also noted another board member is not an AOS member. Larry stated he would prioritize contacts to say we value expertise of all but to be on the board one should be a member of the organization.

MEETINGS—Ken Ward reported neither Anne Miller nor Maureen Shaffer could attend the meeting but sent word they will continue with the meetings at Dauphin Island. Anne has also gotten involved in helping publicize the meetings in advance on the web site.

PUBLIC RELATIONS—Carrie Threadgill reported she tries to post to Facebook as often as possible and requested members send snapshots and pictures from birding trips to post on Facebook. Ken Ward reported Sue Moske had been invited to the meeting as she wants to get involved again, and there is a need for a regional director for Tennessee Valley to serve with Damien Simbeck. She was elected as a board member by acclamation.

DAN C. HOLLIMAN RESEARCH FUND—Greg Harber reminded the board the purpose of the DCHRF is to fund research for avian studies. These do not have to be within the state but can be from adjacent states. The committee reviewed all proposals, and Greg reviewed these for the

board. The committee recommended Kristen Covino (\$750), Will Lewis, (\$750) and T. J. Zinzal (\$500). During discussion the Board agreed it would prefer students from Alabama but we would consider all applications. Carrie asked if these awards can be posted on Facebook with the students providing project summaries. The answer was yes. After further discussion and upon move by Bianca Allen, seconded by Larry Gardella, the board unanimously approved the recommendation of the committee. Greg stated he would send notices of the award to the recipients with a request they share information to post to Facebook.

Ken stated two former recipients from Alabama A&M attended Friday night activities and Eric Margenau spoke. Also, volunteers will be sharing at future meetings.

NEW BUSINESS

Eric Soehren stated he took the initiative to contact SORA as to the possibility of putting *Alabama Birdlife* on that web site in order to gain national and international recognition. The person Eric contacted furnished guidelines and instructions; however, this is a slow process as more input is needed from the contact person in order to be sure everything is done correctly. Eric stated this is a very worthwhile cause and will eventually bring more recognition to AOS, but it will take some time.

Pat Reed inquired as to the possibility of holding board meetings at the Shelby Center as we have use of the building during the afternoon. After discussion it was agreed we should move the board meeting to the Shelby Center unless it is determined we cannot have access at the time of the board meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Upcoming Meetings

THIRD FRIDAY—April 17-19, 2015

Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

SECOND FRIDAY—October 9-11, 2015

Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 22-24, 2016

Winter Meeting, TBD

Linda Reynolds Honored on 30th Anniversary of Eagle Awareness Program

THIRTY YEARS AGO, LINDA REYNOLDS STARTED THE EAGLE Awareness Program at Lake Guntersville State Park. Since that time, tens of thousands of us have been introduced or reintroduced to the majestic Bald Eagle through the efforts of Linda. Your writer and wife Pat went to an Eagle Weekend, as they were commonly called, in 1992. The weekend coincided with an AOS meeting, and the rest, as they say, is history.

I still remember getting up very early in the morning in order to be at the proper place on the side of the road to witness a dozen or more Bald Eagles departing their roosts. As the first birds flew overhead, Pat and I had tears in our eyes; I had never expected to see a Bald Eagle in the wild. But Keith Hudson and a small group of visionaries had other ideas. Keith led a hacking effort that has now produced well over 100 nesting pairs in Alabama. Linda was one of those visionaries. Her idea was to bring the eagles and the people together.

In January 2015, the 30th anniversary of Eagle Weekends, Linda Reynolds was honored at Lake Guntersville State Park where she was park naturalist for many years.

The audience of about 200 enjoyed hearing about Linda's influence throughout the southeast in tributes by John Meredith, former Lake Guntersville State Park superintendent; Ken Thomas, DeSoto State Park superintendent; Anne Miller, founder of the Alabama Wildlife Center; and Mark Jackson, superintendent of Lake Point State Park.

One of the speakers pointed out that Linda led a generation of children and adults to an understanding of the importance of maintaining, appreciating, and protecting the natural world of Alabama.

Mike Jeffreys, the current Lake Guntersville State Park superintendent, presented Linda with a plaque, then unveiled the sign to the future Linda B. Reynolds Nature Center that will be built at the park.

Congratulations, Linda! Well done and well deserved.

—Bob Reed



Creekside Tales

AS A DUES-PAYING MEMBER OF MASTER GARDENERS AND THE Mobile Herb Society, I watch for birds in my acres. My wee orchard/vineyard attracts many birds. Prone to shelter and welcome them, I tend a wounded food supply. As sampling gourmets, these creatures are wanton in their dinning manner.

Who pecks holes in those pampered figs? Blue Jays are suspect, but sly and quick in maneuvers. Raccoons break plum tree branches clambering after midnight feasts, but bird attacks from overhead puncture our purple delights.

Blueberries are a safer investment. Fragile links don't support climbing beasts or perching types, so I wander and top my cereal bowl with greedy gusto. In a good year we all thrive.

Ground feeders are easily seen in action.

John Winn, a retired biologist with the goal of seeing all of our planet's birds, was a wonderful mentor. As his scribe in many Christmas bird counts, I learned much. He knew what bird ate what and searched accordingly. We counted thousands of birds those cold December mornings. His method was wise, so logical.

Once again the predatory falcon's loud cry echoed from my forest. First to emerge, running for home, were my neighbor's show cats. They were terrorized by our resident kestrel.

My formerly resident cardinals have moved south to Susan's yard. She is surrounded by abundant trees and shrubs, some bearing fruits they prefer. Competing with Ron's many feeders, I no longer have the yard of choice. My resident Russian Siamese cat watches this hungrily while enjoying her favorite canned treats.

—Jean Golden, Mobile

Yes, Virginia, They Really Exist

MY GRANDMOTHER TALKED ABOUT HUMMINGBIRDS AS IF they were real, but I was a sophisticated boy of six. I knew they were just like the tooth fairy: they didn't really exist. My next-door neighbor, Philip, and I lived near the city square in Centreville, Alabama, and we played there often in that summer of 1954. One day we were trying

to sneak up on a band of "Indians" camped on the other side of City Hall. We hid behind an abelia shrub, waiting for the right moment to charge. Suddenly our attention was jerked away by a tiny little bird that hummed right up to a flower a foot from our heads. It was green with a white belly, and it flew as if by magic. It was like nothing we had ever seen. It darted from flower to flower, making the delicate blooms below dance in the air. The "enemy" forgotten, we "cowboys" were transfixed by this mythical bird, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

I had to completely reassess the truth that summer day, as I realized that my grandmother had indeed spoken the truth. I have never forgotten that day more than 60 years ago, and hummingbirds still fill me with a sense of awe and discovery. Here in the deep south we have the honor of their presence from mid-March to late October, and their arrival is still reason for celebration, and their departure is a closing of one year and the promise of another.

—Bob Reed

Electronic Yellowhammer?

IT COSTS WELL OVER A DOLLAR AND A HALF TO PRINT AND MAIL *The Yellowhammer*. We are delivering, on a totally voluntary basis, *The Yellowhammer* via the Internet. If you would like to receive your *Yellowhammer*, in color, electronically, as a PDF file, please email the editor at BobReed1987@gmail.com.

Thanks for the Stories

THE YELLOWHAMMER MUST BE PRINTED IN FOUR-PAGE increments. Thus we are always in need of your articles, both short and longer, to make the pages come out right.

If you have an article, story, or amusing incident you would like to share, *please* send it to the Editor. Electronic versions are much easier to copy and paste, but send them by snail mail or paper airplane if you need to. The addresses are on the back cover.

Please send other articles about your birding adventures, trips, yard sightings, or just short vignettes that were interesting, different, or amusing.

JULY 1, 2014 – DECEMBER 31, 2014

2014 AOS *Financial Report*

By RUFINA WARD, *Treasurer*

BEGINNING BALANCE : JULY 1, 2014 \$13,860.16

Income

Membership Dues	1,755.00
Fall Meeting 2014	
Registration	1,725.00
Banquet	1,197.00
DIBS Contribution	581.00
Holliman Scholarship	150.00
Others	55.00

TOTAL INCOME \$5,493.00

Expenses

Publications	
Printers & Stationers (<i>Alabama Birdlife</i>)	1,409.96
Litho Plate & Negative (<i>Yellowhammer</i>)	1,052.93
Workshops, Inc. (<i>Yellowhammer</i>)	294.81
Joe Wheeler State Park deposit	400.00
Greg Miller (fees and expenses)	885.13
Wilton Caterer	1,807.20
Berta Pylant (G. Miller food refund)	31.85
Anne Miller (Blue Rental refund)	439.69
DISL (fall meeting charges)	400.00
DIBS Disbursement	591.00
Hummingbird Research, Inc.	1,000.00
Image	30.00

TOTAL EXPENSES \$8,342.57

ENDING BALANCE: December 31, 2014 \$11,010.59

In addition, during 2014, the Society donated \$1,592 to DIBS, \$2,000 in scholarships to students, and \$1,000 to Hummingbird Research, Inc. in memory of Bob Sargent.

A O S SPRING MEETING, APRIL 17-19, 2015

Meet the Speaker: Louise Zemaitis

LOUISE ZEMAITIS is an artist and naturalist living in Cape May, New Jersey, where she is a popular field trip leader teaching birding workshops as an associate naturalist with New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory. Farther afield, she travels extensively leading for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours and to birding festivals where she is known for her enthusiasm for all natural history subjects. Louise and her husband, Michael O'Brien, have been

guiding young birders at birding events and conferences for many years. In addition to leading, Louise is long time coordinator of the Monarch Monitoring Project in Cape May, compiler of the Cape May Christmas Bird Count, and proprietor of Swallowtail Studio at West End Garage in Cape May. An honors graduate of Temple University's Tyler School of Art, she enjoys working as a freelance artist, and her illustrations have been widely published.



IRDS HAVE ADAPTED TO MOST HABITATS ON THE planet. One of great joys of being a birder is exploring the world in which they live. When we go out in the field, whether we realize it or not, we are in tune with the habitat around us. Different species of birds have certain habitat preferences, some strict and others just tendencies, but all are useful for finding or identifying birds.

Some descriptive bird names were chosen quite appropriately, particularly those of the wrens. Rock Wrens sit on rocks, Canyon Wrens sing in canyons, and Cactus Wrens nest in cacti. Many sparrows were also named for the habitats they choose: Swamp, Field, and Saltmarsh, just to name a few. It is fun to make the same connections that early ornithologists must have made.

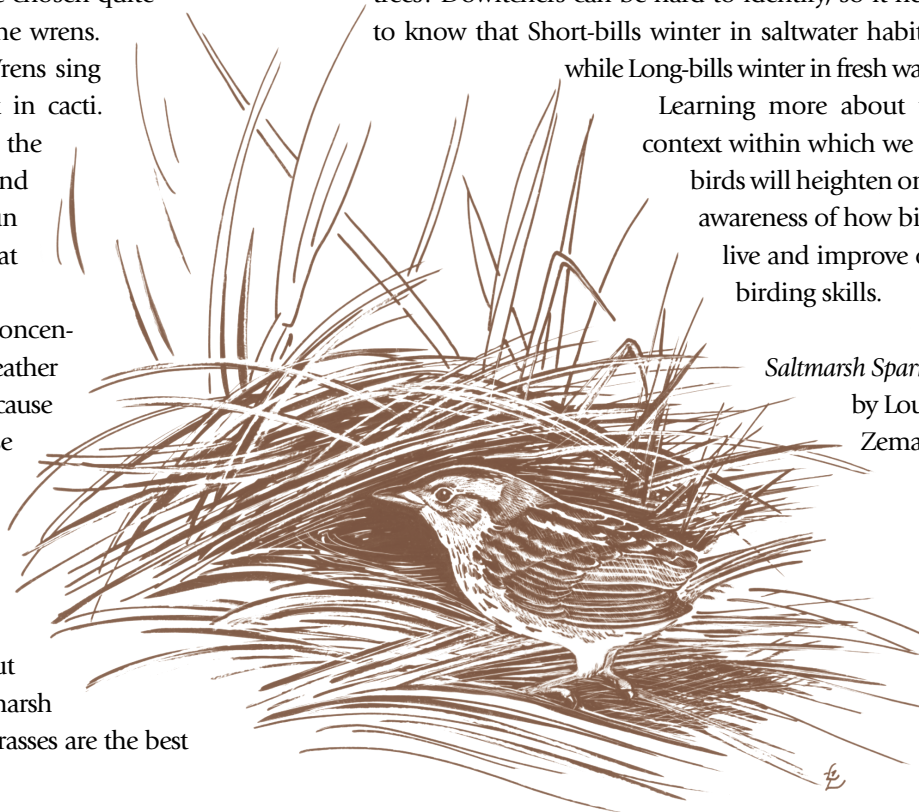
I live in Cape May, New Jersey, a concentration point for migrating birds. Weather conditions often create situations that cause birds to be thrown off course, but these birds have a way of gravitating toward the most appropriate habitat around, where they can find food, water, and shelter. It is amazing how quickly a bird can find its comfort zone. Boreal nesting birds seek out conifers and tundra species prefer marsh or dunes. Healthy fields with native grasses are the best places to find grassland sparrows.

Knowing which trees provide food sources at what time helps locate wayward songbirds. Sassafras trees fruit at the peak of Eastern Kingbird migration in the fall. In the spring, flowering oaks attract warblers and fruiting mulberries attract thrushes, tanagers, and orioles.

The more time you spend in the field, the more you will discover. Did you know that Fish Crows are dumpster divers and Yellow-throated Warblers rarely winter far from palm trees? Dowitchers can be hard to identify, so it helps to know that Short-bills winter in saltwater habitats while Long-bills winter in fresh water.

Learning more about the context within which we see birds will heighten one's awareness of how birds live and improve our birding skills.

Saltmarsh Sparrow
by Louise
Zemaitis



AOS SPRING MEETING 2015

Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Alabama, April 17–19, 2015

FRIDAY, APRIL 17

- 3:00 p.m. Registration—Shelby Center
 6:00 p.m. Social Hour and Pot Luck—Shelby Center
 7:00 p.m. Holliman Award Student Presentation—
 Shelby Center
 7:15 p.m. Members Slide Show—Shelby Center

SATURDAY, APRIL 18

- 7:00 a.m. Field Trips—meet at Sea Lab
 11:30 a.m. Lunch at the Stowers' house, 1618 Cadillac Ave.
 1:30 p.m. Board meeting—Shelby Center
 6:00 p.m. Open bar social—Shelby Center
 6:45 p.m. Banquet—Shelby Center
 7:45 p.m. Program—Louise Zemaitis

SUNDAY, APRIL 19

- 12:00 p.m. Compilation—Goat Tree (Ann and Lynne's
 yard across the street)

ACCOMMODATIONS AND INFORMATION

Motels

Gulf Breeze and Harbor Lights Motel: (800) 286-0296

Rentals

Boardwalk Realty, Inc: (877) 861-3992
 Dauphin Island Real Estate: (888) 707-6444
 Tyson Real Estate: (251) 861-8312
 Pickett Real Estate: (800) 861-3646
 Island Real Estate: (877) 219-7392
 ACP Real Estate, Inc.: (866) 861-3311

Websites

www.gulfinfo.com and www.dauphinisland.cc

FRIDAY NIGHT POT LUCK IS BACK!!!

Don't forget to bring your favorite appetizer, snack, dessert,
 etc. for the social hour.

NOTE: Until further notice, spring and fall banquets are limited to the first 120 people.

AOS SPRING MEETING 2015 REGISTRATION FORM

Complete and return to:

Rufina Ward, 1689 Longleaf Drive NW, Huntsville, AL 35806

Telephone: (256) 837-5646 • E-mail: phinken@wowway.com

Please make checks payable to AOS. Checks must be received by April 7, 2015

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail Address _____

AOS DUES Student: \$10 • Individual: \$25 • Family: \$40 • Sustaining: \$50
 Life (individual): \$350 • Life (family): \$550

Registration @ \$25 per person	\$
Banquet @ \$21 per person	\$
AOS 2015 Dues	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

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