

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 33, NO. 2 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SUMMER 2013

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

FOUNDED 1952



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I WANT TO THANK OUR WONDERFUL speaker at the spring meeting, Charles Duncan. I know we all learned a lot from him and enjoyed his presentation. I think everyone should know that Charles donated his travel expenses and honorarium to the AOS Dan C. Holliman Research Fund, which provides small grants in support of scientific research projects of an ornithological nature that are clearly applicable to Alabama birds. We thank you Charles for your generous support of our endeavors.

I need to take this opportunity to notify our membership that we will soon be filing Articles of Incorporation with the state of Alabama. This is necessary due to the fact that the state has no record of such Articles ever being filed, and there is no existing record of such Articles within the AOS archives. (I have spent more than three years searching for a copy of the AOS Articles to no avail.) The filing of these Articles of Incorporation will allow the Alabama Ornithological Society to be officially recognized as an incorporated non-profit organization by the state and fall under the protection of this code. We are already recognized as a non-profit corporation 501(c)(3) by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) but we will be filing our new Articles to be included in their files along with our Letter of Determination. Rest assured that this in no way affects our rich history of existence since 1952. The Articles of Incorporation can be found on the AOS website at: www.aosbirds.org/documents/articles.pdf.

Once these articles are filed, many revisions to our bylaws will be required in order to bring us into compliance with the Code of Alabama 1975, Volume 7A, Title 10A—Alabama Business and Nonprofit Entities Code. Therefore, please consider this as notice of the intent to amend the AOS bylaws at our business meeting on October 12, 2013. Due to the prohibitive cost of printing this voluminous document in *The Yellowhammer*, a full copy of the revised bylaws can be found on the AOS website at: <http://www.aosbirds.org/documents/revised-by-laws.pdf>. If you do not have access to our website or prefer a paper copy, please contact me via email at brdnrd1022@bellsouth.net, by phone at 205-854-5233, or by mail at 908 Chalkville School Road, Birmingham, Alabama



35215-4038. A copy will be mailed to you upon your request.

Please feel free to contact me with any concerns or questions you may have so they can be addressed prior to the fall meeting. We hope to conduct a brief business meeting to approve these bylaws at the banquet on Saturday night prior to our speaker. The agenda for that meeting will be contained in the fall issue of *The Yellowhammer*. We are including this notice and access to the documents in this issue to ensure that we meet the requirements of our current bylaws which require a 30-day notice of intent to amend the bylaws. We cannot be assured that the

delivery of the fall newsletter would meet that requirement so everyone is getting plenty of advance notice.

I want to assure our membership that your Board has done its due diligence in compiling and approving these new bylaws, and many of the changes you will see are required by the State of Alabama Code. There has been active discussion on all aspects of the revised bylaws, and we have tried to consider every circumstance where these will be applied.

Along with the filing of the Articles of Incorporation and the adoption of revised bylaws, we will be placing some paragraphs in policies, e.g., membership, publications, etc., for ease of change in the future. The present AOS Constitution will no longer be relevant. Everything currently contained in the Constitution can be found in the aforementioned documents. The present Constitution can be viewed at www.aosbirds.org/documents/constitution.pdf. Various policies will be established by the board, e.g. membership, publications, committees, etc., for ease of revision and will be presented at the fall membership meeting. Once the new bylaws and policies are approved we will be asking the membership to repeal the existing Constitution in order to eliminate duplication of documentation.

Every effort is being made to give all AOS members a voice in all matters of importance to the organization. I want to thank you in advance for your cooperation and active participation in this important procedure for AOS and encourage you to contact me as soon as possible if you have anything you wish to discuss.

Arizona Nesting Birds



HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO visit southeast Arizona in May 2013. It was a wonderful trip, both scenic and

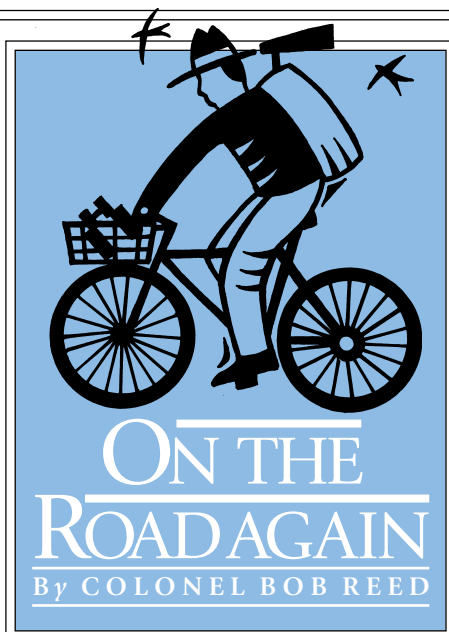
birdy. We started with Mount Lemmon, in the Santa Catalina Mountains north of Tucson. There we found a pair of Elf Owls nesting in an impossibly tiny hole in a dead pine tree. By waiting not so patiently until deep dusk, we were treated to both parents as they changed shifts. Two Northern Goshawks flew over while we waited.

The next stop was at the sewage lagoon at Willcox, where we found sub-adult Killdeer alongside two species of phalaropes and White-rumped Sandpipers.

We toured the Chiricahua Mountains for parts of three days. Rising to over 8000 feet, they offer exceptional habitat for many birds that are seen nowhere else in the United States. However, there was a terrible fire almost two years to the day before, and much of the area is still blackened, with patches of lupine and other small grasses and wildflowers the only relief from the scars. There seemed to be the normal variety of what you would expect but fewer birds in general. Not all the area burned, of course; many areas were still vibrant.

We found all the Chiricahua specialties, Olive and Red-faced Warblers, Mexican Chickadee, and even a black bear, but little real evidence of nesting.

However, the desert was a different story. Babies and nests were everywhere. We saw Purple Martins nesting in saguaro cactus, while a Cactus Wren and a Bendire's Thrasher fed babies in different cholla cactus nests. A Gambel's Quail with chicks was poking around below. We found a Gilded Woodpecker coming out of a nest in another saguaro cactus.



Later, we found a Great Horned Owl with two chicks in an abandoned cotton gin and Barn Owls that appeared to be on a nest.

The Huachuca Mountains were also neat. Garden Canyon, on Fort Huachuca, was rich with nests, including one spot just above the last picnic area that held at least seven different nests in view from a circle about 15 feet in diameter. The primary targets for the morning were Greater Peewee and Sulfur-bellied Flycatcher. The flycatcher was seen after someone heard the call. The peewee almost skunked us; we hiked in, and uphill, about an hour and half looking and listening

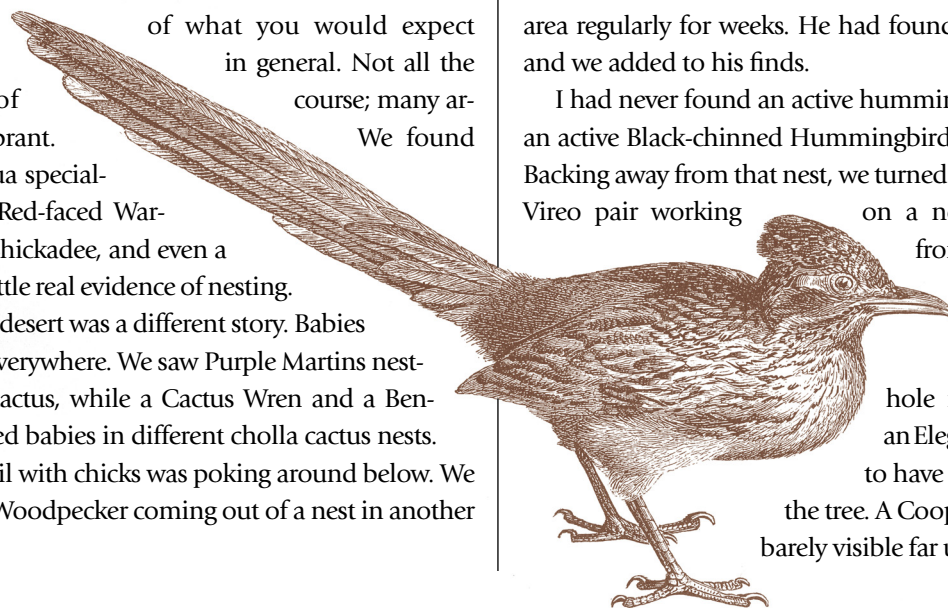
constantly to no avail. Finally, we decided that there simply weren't any on the mountain yet and started back. As we paused to look at a Brown Creeper, we heard a Greater Peewee call, right on the path!

But back to the nests. Since 9/11, a Fort Huachuca guide/representative has to accompany each group if there are any non-military personnel participating on the tour. Ours was Ted, who was an excellent birder who had been scouting the area regularly for weeks. He had found several of the nests, and we added to his finds.

I had never found an active hummingbird nest before, so an active Black-chinned Hummingbird nest was a real treat. Backing away from that nest, we turned around to see a Bell's Vireo pair working

on a nest about three feet from the road. A White-breasted Nuthatch had a nest cavity in a sycamore knot-hole right behind it, and an Elegant Trogon appeared to have a nest near the top of

the tree. A Cooper's Hawk had a nest barely visible far up the hillside. I spot-



ted a Buff-bellied Flycatcher, a lifer for me, carrying nesting material and followed it to a nearly completed nest directly above the road. Training the scope on it, I watched construction for several very enjoyable minutes. A Cassin's Vireo had a neat little nest hanging from a forked branch in a conifer. The final nester was a Phainopepla pair high up in a tree.

One of the best and worst finds on the trip was an active Greater Roadrunner nest in a palm tree at a resort in Rio Rico. We watched the nestlings being tended for 24 hours, until we returned to find the tree severely trimmed and the nest and birds gone!

The most interesting event of the trip may have been the fantastic mating display of a male Bronzed Cowbird. He flashed his wings while facing left and right and became more and more amorous by the minute. After four or five minutes of increasing heat, he all of a sudden seemed to levitate straight up with almost no wing action, rising to an altitude of three or four feet, and then settling down in the same spot. Sadly, at least for him, his advances got him nowhere.

This was a Field Guides-led trip, and I highly recommend them. In three trips, Pat and I have no complaints.

By the way, as we walked up a canyon in search of a Spotted Owl, the guide, Chris Benesh, was reminding us again to leave any rattlesnakes alone, then remembered the last person to ignore that instruction was a forever-kid by the name of Bob Sargent.



Electronic Yellowhammer?

IT COSTS WELL OVER \$1.50 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

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 can make one. 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.

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.

Important Dates

SECOND FRIDAY—October 11–13, 2013
Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 24–26, 2014
Winter Meeting, TBA

THIRD FRIDAY—April 18–20, 2014
Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, APRIL 20, 2013

Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By DANA HAMILTON, *Secretary*

THE AOS EXECUTIVE BOARD MET SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 2013 at Dauphin Island Sea Labs Galathea Hall on Dauphin Island Alabama. The meeting was called to order at 1:45 p.m.

by Bianca J. Allen, AOS President. The minutes from the January 26, 2013 meeting were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Mary Frances Stayton reported that the current AOS checking account balance is \$17,841.17, but no expenses for the spring meeting have been paid. Mary Frances advised that she paid Dan Holliman Research Fund scholarships totaling \$2000.00 to three recipients. Greg Harber advised that these scholarships were paid to the applicants that we discussed at the January 2013 board meeting.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Conservation Report: Greg Harber reported that he sent a letter to the Alabama Historical Commission regarding the recent burn at Fort Morgan. The response that he received indicated that the burn was conducted by the Alabama Forestry Commission. Greg also reported that he visited Fort Morgan on April 20, 2013 to view the site of the burn firsthand. He reported that much of the understory is beginning to come back after the burn. Some of the mature pine trees are dead, and the shrubs and bushes in the Middle Ground area were destroyed by the fire.

Greg advised the AOS board that he would like to send a follow-up letter to the Alabama Historical Commission requesting that the Fort develop a long term habitat management plan which includes input from the various stakeholders, including the birding community. He also recommended that AOS finalize the on-going AOS initiative regarding restoration of the Fort Morgan habitat.

Greg Jackson segued the discussion into the status of the AOS Fort Morgan habitat restoration initiative. He reported that the committee first identified zones of birding habitat at Fort Morgan that have significantly degraded over time. The

committee identified areas that could be enhanced by adding new plants or by simply leaving it alone (no mowing zones) so that the habitat could restore itself. The next step is to make a list of plants (preferably non-invasive native plants) that could be added to the habitat that would be low maintenance or zero maintenance, that are already adapted to the area, that would be beneficial to birds in some way (providing either food or cover), and that would be aesthetically pleasing so that it will fit into the Fort Morgan landscape.

Greg Jackson asked the AOS board for their input regarding specific issues that have arisen on the committee. The board had a lengthy discussion regarding specific details of the best way to effectuate the initiative. Greg will take this discussion back to the committee for further discussion and action.

Publications Report: Col. Bob Reed reported that he has received several complaints recently from people who have not received their *Yellowhammer* on time. Col. Bob stated that this has been a recurring problem since AOS changed the mailing of *The Yellowhammer* from first class mail to the discounted bulk rate. The board discussed the difference in the cost of first class postage versus bulk rate postage rates. The cost to mail *The Yellowhammer* by first class postage is over \$1.00 per issue. The board discussed the need to encourage AOS members to receive *The Yellowhammer* electronically (via email) which completely eliminates the postage cost. Currently, AOS mails approximately 325 *Yellowhammer* newsletters per issue and approximately 100 *Yellowhammers* are sent electronically. A lengthy discussion followed.

Education Report: Shirley Farrell reported that the AOS booth at Dauphin Island Discovery Day was a tremendous success. Hundreds of children and adults came to the AOS booth, took AOS materials, and gave extremely positive responses. Shirley and Carrie Threadgill manned the AOS booth, but several other AOS members came by and volunteered to help at the booth for an hour or so. Visitors to the booth came not only from Dauphin Island, but also from across the bay and across the state. Shirley and Carrie

signed up about 100 new kids for the *Millie Mocker* electronic newsletter.

Shirley also asked the AOS board to consider a proposal to sponsor the Flying Wild program in the areas of the state which are not covered by the Birmingham Audubon Society's five-county service area. Shirley advised that she has trained instructors available who can teach the Flying Wild course. AOS sponsorship would be needed for fundraising, such as holding silent auctions. The cost of the Flying Wild program essentially involves the purchase of the books. Each book costs \$10.00 and there is a minimum requirement of 100 books per order.

ABRC Report: Greg Jackson advised that the ABRC has adopted a cloud-based system for distribution of the records for review among the committee members. He forwards new records for review via PDF to Steve McConnell seasonally. Steve further enhances the records and places them into a secure cloud database that the ABRC committee members can log into and post comments. This new system has sped up the review process and is far more efficient than the previous "round robin" method.

DIBS Report: Greg Harber reported that the next acquisition will most likely be the Lackland Street wetland which is four lots that are diagonally southwest of the fire station. This will be discussed in the April 21 DIBS meeting. John Winn gave money to the South Alabama Community Foundation. This matching grant represents a \$20,000 funding opportunity for DIBS. Bianca advised that Ralph Havard is the current president of DIBS. She advised that he lives on the island and will be in attendance at the AOS Saturday evening meeting.

Website: Bianca Allen commended Kathy Hicks for staying on top of things on the website. As soon as Kathy receives any information regarding the AOS meetings, she puts a flashing indicator on the front page of the website to draw attention to the meeting information. Bianca advised that we are getting more proactive with the website.

OLD BUSINESS

AOS Articles of Incorporation: Bianca Allen reported the status of her efforts to resolve the Articles of Incorporation issue. In addition to working with Larry Gardella, who drafted the Articles of Incorporation document on behalf of AOS, Bianca has consulted with an advisor who specializes in the governmental factors involved with non-profit

organizations. The basic issue is that there is no record in the state of Alabama's records that AOS was ever incorporated and AOS does not have any documents to prove that it was ever incorporated. To rectify the situation, AOS must file a new Articles of Incorporation document.

Prior to filing the new Articles of Incorporation document, several changes to the AOS by-laws are needed in order to comply with the state of Alabama requirements for incorporation of a non-profit organization. Bianca conducted a lengthy discussion regarding the changes that are needed. Additionally, she will publish a link to the revised documents in the summer issue of *The Yellowhammer* to apprise the AOS membership of the proposed changes and a vote will be taken by the membership at the fall membership meeting.

New Bird Checklist: Bianca Allen reported that Carrie Threadgill has arranged to have the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources print the AOS bird checklist for us. All that DCNR requested in return is that their logo appears on the checklist.

NEW BUSINESS

Dauphin Island Lodging and Meeting Arrangements with DISL: Bianca Allen led a discussion about the changes in the accommodations for AOS members at Dauphin Island Sea Lab and the use of Galathea Hall for the Friday evening AOS program. She reiterated that the primary mission of the DISL is education. As it becomes more popular with school groups, there is more competition for lodging at the Sea Lab. Some alternatives were discussed, but no decisions were made.

Bianca asked for any additional items for discussion. Since no additional items were raised, the AOS board meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

Notice of Intent to Amend AOS Bylaws

THE MEMBERSHIP OF AOS IS HEREBY GIVEN NOTICE of the intent to amend the AOS bylaws at our business meeting on October 12, 2013. Please see the President's article for further details.

A O S S P R I N G M E E T I N G , A P R I L 1 9 - 2 1 , 2 0 1 3

Spring Meeting Report

By GREGORY J. HARBER



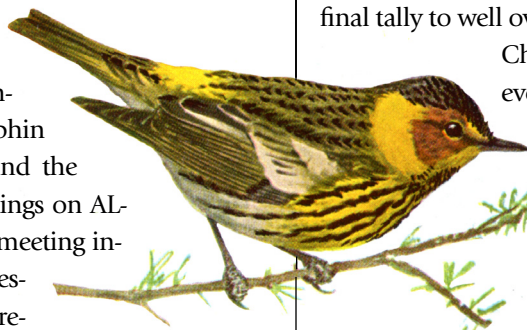
ERHAPS IT WAS MERELY COINCIDENCE, BUT AS I ascended the span of the Dauphin Island bridge that Friday evening the clock in my car read 12:00, and when I reached the bottom it read 12:01—Saturday morning had arrived. It was just as well; I was ready to leave the events of the previous week behind and what better place to do that than Dauphin Island?

The Boston Marathon bombing had gripped the nation's attention all week, culminating with the apprehension of the surviving suspect that very evening. There was also the horrific explosion and fire at the fertilizer plant in West, Texas, and the ricin-laced letters that were mailed to several elected officials. I could not set foot on the island soon enough.

When I crested the span the twinkling lights of the village of Dauphin Island sparkled in the darkness and the weekend stretched before me. Postings on AL-birds during the week prior to the meeting indicated that many migrants were present at the coast, and the weather forecast for an approaching cold front held hope for even more.

Saturday morning I caught the early ferry to Fort Morgan in hopes that the same migration magic that filled the nets of the Hummer Bird/Study Group during their banding session might smile on me. Although not a fallout by any stretch, a stroll into the Stables area produced several lovely birds: a pair of Painted Buntings and Scarlet Tanagers and male Black-throated Green Warbler, among others. I also seized the opportunity to survey firsthand the results of the late January fire in the Middle Ground.

Back on Dauphin Island before noon, I soon learned of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Bank and Cave Swallows at the east end of the golf course. I banked the Bank but missed the other two; a male Bobolink was a striking consolation prize. And although I did not see them, many attendees observed a family of red foxes in their den on the golf course.



Lunch at the home of John and Jenny Stowers was jammed full with great food, good friends and engaging conversations, and the view of the sound from their deck was as pleasing as always. Many thanks go to Sto, Jenny and their "support crew" for their gracious hospitality.

Speaking of Jenny and Sto, one of the more colorful species observed during the weekend was a stunning male Cape May Warbler seen in the shrubs near their house. Other species of note observed during the weekend included a Merlin and Peregrine Falcon, the usual collection of Whimbrels, and Gray Kingbird. The species total at the Sunday compilation was 191, but reports filtering in after the weekend raised the final tally to well over 200 species.

Charles Duncan's presentation on Saturday evening following the banquet drew rave reviews from everyone in attendance. Charles' roots in Alabama go way back and he and his wife Laura have many friends here, so it was a pleasant treat to have them as our guests.

Charles is the director of the Shorebird Recovery Project at the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences and his program focused on their fine work. What I found most heartening was seeing the tremendous impact that a group of people dedicated to a cause can have on the conservation outcomes for an entire group of birds, in this case shorebirds. Congratulations, Charles, and thank you for your dedicated efforts.

The last bird I saw before I drove off the island on Sunday afternoon was a male Prothonotary Warbler, plying the tangle of vines and branches at the Tupelo-Gum Swamp—a DIBS holding. I held fast to the image of that bird because I knew that once Monday morning dawned the harsh reality of the world at large would greet me. But for a few blissful moments at least, it was just me and the warbler in one of my favorite places on earth—and I can live with that.

2013 AOS Spring Meeting Compilation List Dauphin Island, Alabama, April 19–21

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE weekend included Pacific Loon, Glossy Ibis, and Inca Dove. Birds marked with an * were identified only by the Big Day team of AOS members Eric Soehren, Bill Summerour, and John Trent in Baldwin and Mobile Counties, and not by the general membership.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck*
Canada Goose
Wood Duck*
Mallard
Mottled Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Green-winged Teal
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Wild Turkey*
Northern Bobwhite
Pacific Loon
Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
Northern Gannet
American White Pelican*
Brown Pelican
Double-crested Cormorant
Anhinga*
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron
Reddish Egret
Cattle Egret
Green Heron
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron*
White Ibis
*Glossy Ibis**
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Swallow-tailed Kite
Mississippi Kite
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier*
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
American Kestrel

Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Clapper Rail
King Rail*
Virginia Rail
Sora
American Coot
Black-bellied Plover
Snowy Plover
Wilson's Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Piping Plover
Killdeer
American Oystercatcher
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Willet
Lesser Yellowlegs
Whimbrel
Ruddy Turnstone
Red Knot
Sanderling
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
White-rumped Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Dunlin
Stilt Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Laughing Gull
Bonaparte's Gull*
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Least Tern
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Forster's Tern
Royal Tern
Sandwich Tern
Black Skimmer
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
White-winged Dove
Mourning Dove
Inca Dove*
Common Ground-Dove
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Black-billed Cuckoo
Eastern Screech Owl
Great Horned Owl*
Barred Owl
Common Nighthawk
Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker*
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
Eastern Wood Pewee
Acadian Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe*
Great Crested Flycatcher
Western Kingbird
Eastern Kingbird
Gray Kingbird
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Loggerhead Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Cave Swallow
Barn Swallow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown-headed Nuthatch
Carolina Wren
House Wren
Sedge Wren
Marsh Wren
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Eastern Bluebird
Veery
Swainson's Thrush
Wood Thrush*
Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
Brown Thrasher
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
Tennessee Warbler
Nashville Warbler
Northern Parula
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Cape May Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Blackburnian Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Pine Warbler
Prairie Warbler

Palm Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Cerulean Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
American Redstart
Prothonotary Warbler
Worm-eating Warbler
Swainson's Warbler*
Ovenbird
Northern Waterthrush
Louisiana Waterthrush
Common Yellowthroat
Hooded Warbler
Yellow-breasted Chat*
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
Eastern Towhee
Bachman's Sparrow*
Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow*
Savannah Sparrow
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Blue Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting
Painted Bunting
Dickcissel
Bobolink
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark*
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle
Boat-tailed Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird
Orchard Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
House 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 **bold-faced**, 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.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge is 75 Years Old



LOCATED ALONG THE TENNESSEE RIVER BETWEEN Huntsville and Decatur, Alabama, Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge was established 75 years ago, in July 1938. Today the 35,000-acre refuge attracts thousands of wintering waterfowl and sandhill cranes each year. It's the winter home for Alabama's largest duck population. It has also become an important winter area for the experimental "eastern migratory population" of whooping cranes. Thirteen of these whooping cranes were at Wheeler NWR last winter.

The refuge also hosts 650,000 to 700,000 *human* visitors annually.

Refuge manager and dedicated birder Dwight Cooley emphasizes that this anniversary means a lot to the refuge staff and the local communities. "The refuge is providing outdoor recreation and conservation education to an increasing number of visitors each year. In fact, 10 of the 50 sites along the North Alabama Birding Trail are on the refuge."

The above article by Paul J. Baicich is reprinted with permission from the July/August 2013 edition of Bird Watchers Digest.

Congratulations to Dwight Cooley and Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

THE WHEELER WILDLIFE REFUGE ASSOCIATION WILL HOST an anniversary celebration 9 a.m.–5 p.m., Saturday, October 5, 2013, at the Wheeler Refuge Visitor Center. Activities will include special animal shows, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's Lancershot Game, a kids casting contest, arrowhead making, bird banding, hot air balloon, archery, and hay rides. For more information, go to www.friendsofwheelerrefuge.org, or Wheeler NWR's Facebook page.

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

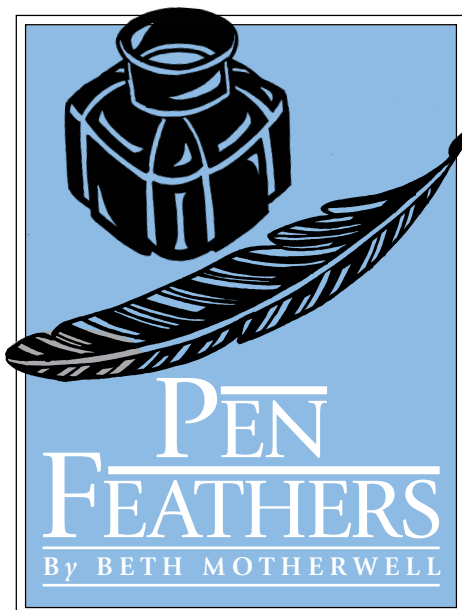
Fall 2013	August 5, 2013
Winter 2013	November 10, 2013
Spring 2014	February 10, 2014

Remembering a Birding Hot Spot

FOR A LIFELONG BIRDER, A few places stand out in the memory as particularly rich and rewarding spots. Palo Dura Canyon, in the northern Texas panhandle, is such a place for me. Situated 20 miles southeast of Amarillo, the canyon is an unexpected gash carved into the high, flat plain of the *llano estacado* by the Prairie Dog Town fork of the Red River. Like a mini Grand Canyon, it offers a protected, watered oasis for wildlife, and camping facilities with hiking trails for human visitors. I first discovered it in my 20s, heading west to Phoenix for summer work.

On that first May morning, I was still nestled in a cozy sleeping bag in the tent, when the loud “gobble, gobble, gobble” of a Wild Turkey jarred me alert. I found my binoculars, slowly unzipped the fly, and peeked out to behold a sparkling, dewy-fresh landscape and, just yards away, a troop of male turkeys displaying for their females. The toms were resplendent in their breeding plumages, glittering gold, green, brown, orange and purple, while fanning their tails, shivering their dropped wings, and rotating royally to show the cobs every angle of their glory. The scene was a sheer joy to witness, and I had a front-row seat in a ready-made blind!

Only half an hour later, I was dressed and out of the tent preparing breakfast at the picnic table when a simple, distinct chirp caused me to turn and see a whole tree-full of Painted Buntings, ten yards away. Perched on bare branches with the regularity of a flock, the migrants had obviously rested here for the night, multicolored males predominant in a sprinkling of yellow-green females. In contrast to the surrounding pale desert tones, their wild primary color schemes belied reality, and I had to check my senses to verify that this was a real scene and not a leftover dream. But there they were, arrayed like bright Christmas ornaments on a bare tree—one of the



most beautiful sights I've ever beheld.

While packing, I also logged Say's Phoebe and Scaled Quail, all lifers for me. I would have stayed for days in that magical canyon if schedules hadn't dictated differently. But I never forgot the amazing sights of Palo Dura Canyon and, in my 40s, I returned, this time for a week of unhurried camping and hiking. And again, the birding was rich and other-worldly.

On one particular day, I elected to take a long solitary hike into the arid brushland, away from the river. After hours of trekking in the heat, I stopped to rest on a skeletal log by the side of the trail. It was high noon, the air

was hot and very still, when I heard the alarming sound of a fast-approaching projectile, like a fighter jet. I cowered and looked skyward to view the threat before it struck me. To my utter amazement, I saw a bird rocketing earthward in a suicide dive at very high speed, headed directly for impact with the ground. The sound I'd heard was made by air rushing over the ruffling feathers of his doomed body. Yet, at the very last possible instant, this bird pulled out of the dive with such natural control that I was dumb-struck. Only then did I see that it was a Mississippi Kite, and he lightly flew out of sight.

But he'd just climbed higher, for, soon, I heard the approaching roar once more, saw the kamikaze dive again, and witnessed the last-second save. Was this bird a crazy? An aberrant member of his tribe? Or was this a typical way for kites to test their aerial skills? He couldn't just be "having fun." Surely his heart was pounding as fast as mine was. Oh! There it was again, for a third time, the ominous sound of a solid object speeding toward imminent annihilation. Yet, as he pulled out of this death dive, with a graceful flourish he flew to a nearby tree and mated with the female kite which had been watching the show all along—no doubt, just as mesmerized as I was.

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 1325
DAUPHIN ISLAND, AL 36528

AOS is a 501(c)(3) organization
Printed on Recycled Paper

Federal EIN: 63-1229959

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 33, NO. 2 • SUMMER 2013

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The Yellowhammer, the newsletter of the Alabama Ornithological Society, is published four times a year. Editorial Office: 88838 Tallassee Highway, Tallassee, AL 36078. Send articles to be considered for publication to: BobReed1987@gmail.com. Subscriptions to *The Yellowhammer* and *Alabama Birdlife* are included in the AOS annual membership dues. Single copies \$2.00. Complimentary copies available for review and promotional purposes.

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



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