

THE YELLOWHAMMER

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

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THE LAST TIME A COMMON Yellowthroat was reported to eBird from Lamar County was in 2010, when Marshall Iliff, eBird project leader from Cornell Lab of Ornithology, visited Alabama to encourage greater participation in eBird. Besides offering numerous workshops about eBird, Marshall did some birding around the state, and many of his sightings are still the only reports for the species in whatever county he was visiting. So it's time for Alabama's birders to bring the eBird records up to date.

I've spent the last few days delving into the eBird database to learn more about what is needed here. What I found is both good and bad news. About half of Alabama's counties have good numbers of eBird reports from around the year. Dedicated AOS birders of north Alabama like Damien Simbeck, Steve McConnell, and Sue Moske have made sure that most of our northern counties are pretty well documented. AOS birders in Jefferson and Shelby Counties and Montgomery and Lee Counties like Scott Duncan, Larry Gardella, and Geoff Hill have also been actively reporting observations to eBird. Eric Soehren and John Trent, biologists with the Alabama Department of Conservation stationed at the Wehle Land Conservation Center in Bullock County, have done an awesome job of reporting in their area and elsewhere around the state (John's article about weekly patch reporting to eBird is on page 4). And of course, the highest number of birds, and eBird checklists, come from our two coastal counties, where AOS members Howard Horne, Ben Garmon, and Andrew Haffenden are among the top eBird reporters.

But as I examined the eBird database closely, I realized that nearly half of our counties are seriously under-reported. I based my conclusions on three factors. The first is, of course, the number of bird species reported for each county. The highest species count was for Baldwin County (393), and the lowest was Lamar County (84). The second factor was the total number of eBird checklists submitted from each county. The highest number of checklists was from Mobile county (11,867), and the lowest was from Choctaw County (19). The third factor can be found by selecting an Alabama



county in the eBird database, and clicking on the bar chart link. The bar charts show the county-wide occurrence of each species week by week throughout the year. They make fascinating reading when the species is well reported. For example, in Madison County, a bulge shows the spring arrival of Eastern Wood Peewees, and then a drop to a thin line as many of the birds move north, leaving behind a smaller breeding population, followed by a bulge again in the fall as the migrants move south through the county before disappearing entirely in the fourth week of October. The bar charts are used in many ways to help researchers and ordi-

nary birders locate and study a particular bird species. But they are only useful if eBird receives enough checklists to fill out the entire year. This is where Alabama's eBird reporting is weakest. Twenty-four Alabama counties have no eBird reports for at least ten weeks and as many as 38 weeks out of the year! It's not just the remote, out of the way places, either. Take for example, the Cahaba National Wildlife Refuge in Bibb County: from the last week of August until the end of the year, no one has ever reported to eBird except for one week in October.

On page 5 you will find a list of Alabama counties and their eBird totals for the three factors just described. It provides a fascinating look at the behavior of birds and birders in our state—for of course the human factor has a heavy influence on eBird data, and counties with the largest human populations have the highest bird counts. eBird checklists from regular and frequent visits to favorite locations can be extremely valuable sources of data, as John Trent's article explains. However, we also need to explore underserved areas to provide a solid database for the birdlife of our state. Long-time AOS members like Sue Moske, Larry Gardella, John Trent, Ken Wills, Rick and Ron Kittinger, and Don and Judy Self show up on the eBird records of many counties. We need more birders willing to explore these under-reported counties, timing their visits seasonally to fill in the major gaps. Counties most in need of attention are listed in **bold**. As I suggested in a previous article for *The Yellowhammer*, you can make your eBird reports especially useful if you choose

to report from sites on the Alabama Birding Trails system.

As I said before, the news is both good and bad. The good news is that many dedicated Alabama birders are already using their skills to observe and report on the state's birdlife to eBird. This is important scientific work that is especially urgent at a time when so many bird species are in decline. Each checklist we submit has long-term value for understanding and protecting the birdlife of Alabama. The bad news is that many, many other excellent birders are just not taking the time and trouble to report to eBird. So if we talk about it, think about it, and do it, maybe someday all of us Alabama birders will get the habit of reporting our sightings to eBird. As president of AOS, I see this campaign to create a solid eBird database for Alabama as a major goal for our organization, on a par with the Breeding Bird Survey. It will

eBirding Alabama Birding Trails

By JOHN TRENT



AS ANNE MILLER MENTIONED IN THE PREVIOUS issue of *The Yellowhammer*, the Alabama Birding Trails system offers a great opportunity for birders to get out and experience new birding locations. Submitting these sightings to eBird serves to enhance our understanding of birdlife at these sites and throughout the state as well as improving eBird's capability to analyze data for conservation-oriented research. While data from repeated visits at the well-known "hotspots" along the trail is important and provides a solid understanding of birds over time, any opportunity to visit the lesser or never visited sites helps tremendously to fill gaps in data coverage. I am currently in the midst of "eBirding" one such birding trail site in Barbour County where the majority of eBird data comes from just a few sites, notably Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge and Lakepoint State Park. A few miles to the south is the Yoholo Micco Trail located within the city limits of Eufaula. The trail is a stop on the Wiregrass Birding Trail and is a Rails to Trails project that

take years, and real effort by our members, but it's important and rewarding work. I feel privileged to be working together on this campaign with so many fine and gifted Alabamians.

I'll wrap this up with some more good news: there are lots of first sightings still to be reported around the state that should be easy for any competent birder. First sightings, and the birders' names, become part of the permanent record on the eBird database. Also, each county or hotspot lists the birders with the highest numbers of birds reported from that location. There are plenty of opportunities out there to leave your mark by observing and reporting to eBird in those under-reported counties. Here's one to think about: no one has ever reported a Swallow-tailed Kite to eBird from Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge, although the birds are known to breed in the area. AOS birders need to get busy!

was completed in 2010. It covers 3.2 miles from downtown Eufaula to Old Town Creek Park (also a birding trail stop). After visiting the downtown Eufaula segment of the trail a few times during the end of 2015, I was quite eager to begin exploring a new location in the county where the urban interface of city development and greenspace would offer a nice contrast to the expansive woodland and wetland habitats at the refuge and state park.

Birding a site (or patch) repeatedly has always been my favorite aspect of birding. Over time you become intimately familiar with what the expected species are and what the local rarities are, when the arrival and departure times are for migrants, and where breeding territories and nests are distributed during the nesting season. Thanks to the tools provided by eBird you can effortlessly monitor your progress, which in turn provides incentives to simply get out and bird more. The most useful tool for patch birding is the Bar Chart which provides a visualization of how frequently each species occurs throughout the year. The chart is broken into four periods each month, so in essence each week provides a clean slate to go out and see what can be added for that period. The Patch tool is the easiest way to keep track your personal statistics, including which species are new for the month, year, and life. You can also compare your patch with other eBirders.

So far I've documented 109 species and submitted 33 complete effort-based eBird checklists, and counting. While

eBird Rankings for Alabama Counties

Rank	County	Species	Reports	Weeks not reported	Rank	County	Species	Reports	Weeks not reported
1	Baldwin	393	10,655	0	35	Marengo	161	738	0
2	Mobile	365	11,867	0	36	Dale	169	659	0
3	Lauderdale	289	1,994	0	37	Clarke	156	901	6
4	Colbert	282	1,814	0	38	Cleburne	155	211	9
5	Morgan	280	2,179	0	39	Sumter	155	150	13
6	Limestone	276	1,772	0	40	Henry	153	324	14
7	Barbour	263	1,012	0	41	Chambers	152	148	8
8	Montgomery	260	3,725	0	42	DeKalb	152	767	8
9	Madison	254	10,216	0	43	Butler	150	120	9
10	Lawrence	248	831	1	44	Tallapoosa	150	354	7
11	Marshall	247	1,010	0	45	Talladega	149	635	17
12	Jefferson	240	4,892	0	46	Autauga	147	380	0
13	Shelby	240	1,922	0	47	Dallas	147	090	10
14	Lee	230	2,378	0	48	Etowah	146	225	6
15	Elmore	216	2,106	1	49	Washington	143	263	4
16	Jackson	214	845	0	50	Escambia	139	128	10
17	Covington	208	629	0	51	Coosa	136	239	10
18	Hale	206	500	3	52	Bibb	136	192	19
19	Bullock	203	1,983	0	53	Walker	133	101	20
20	Macon	193	1,371	0	54	Greene	132	105	12
21	Geneva	190	362	1	55	Pickens	131	107	18
22	Russell	187	142	14	56	Blount	128	445	0
23	Winston	184	2,580	0	57	Coffee	126	207	8
24	Tuscaloosa	181	532	1	58	Clay	117	1,001	29
25	Calhoun	180	984	0	59	Marion	117	124	19
26	Perry	180	649	14	60	Pike	116	83	19
27	Cherokee	177	165	9	61	Conecuh	115	46	23
28	St. Clair	177	675	2	62	Randolph	114	193	2
29	Lowndes	176	325	1	63	Chilton	111	119	18
30	Houston	173	641	0	64	Fayette	109	26	36
31	Cullman	172	437	3	65	Choctaw	105	19	38
32	Wilcox	171	97	14	66	Crenshaw	95	27	35
33	Monroe	164	337	10	67	Lamar	84	27	37
34	Franklin	161	188	20					

Bold type indicates counties most in need of attention.

the trail may not have quite the diversity of the nearby refuge and state park, birds are plentiful with consistent activity thanks to the variety of habitats the trail covers over a short distance. Habitats include city and residential development, hardwood and pine forest stands, creek channels and beaver ponds, and an expansive stretch of uninterrupted lake views. By the end of the year I hope to have a complete snapshot of birdlife along the trail which will be a permanent record in eBird and can be referenced by future birders visiting the Eufaula area.

Any data that birders in Alabama can contribute to new or infrequently visited sites will be very beneficial to eBird and the Alabama Birding Trail system. Just a few visits each season will go a long way in improving our basic understanding of birds at these sites. To see what birding trail stops are nearest to you visit www.alabamabirdingtrails.com (or download the Alabama Birding Trails iPhone app). To see what the current eBird coverage is for each site visit www.ebird.org and search using the "Hotspot Explorer." Yoholo Micco Trail Hotspot page: <http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1088843>.

A Tale of Two Prairie Restorations

By KEN WILLS & DICK MILLS



ORTH AMERICAN PRAIRIES CAN BE SIMPLY DEFINED as open areas dominated by grasses, and the extensive grasslands of our central plains are probably what most of us think of when they hear the word "prairie." Prior to European settlement, Alabama and other southeastern states had quite large tracts of grassland and savanna-like habitat. The Black Belt prairies found over chalk outcrops in central Alabama are, in terms of plant species composition, essentially extensions of the mid-western prairies, and there were pockets of prairie in the Coosa River Valley where grasses and forbs (flowering plants), typical of the Midwest, grew alongside endemic species such as whorled sunflower and Mohr's Barbara's buttons. Rocky outcrops, dry ridges and seasonally dry flat woods across Alabama were once covered by open pine and oak forest savannas that supported a rich ground cover of grasses and wildflowers including big blue stem, Indian grass, sunflowers and blazing stars. Frequent fires, which thinned out trees and the woody understory, were the key to maintaining these prairies and savannas. In the past, fires were sparked by lightning and set by Native Americans, but as the state became more settled, fires were actively suppressed and most of our forests became thicker, shadier and less conducive to the growth of these grasses and forbs. Today most of Alabama's native prairie species are restricted to power line and railroad rights of way, cemeteries and the shallow soils over near surface rock formations. Switch grass, purple prairie clover, prairie cone flower and prairie blazing

star are no longer abundant in Alabama. However, there is a growing nationwide movement and interest in converting old farmland, pastures and excessive lawns into a more diverse mixture of native grasses and wildflowers for the sake of wildlife and biodiversity. Although small in size, our prairie restoration projects at Moss Rock Preserve and Limestone Park are attempts to restore a bit of Alabama's biodiversity heritage for people, birds and other wildlife species.

The Friends of Moss Rock Preserve have worked on trail development and exotic privet removal projects for years. We are pleasantly surprised to see coreopsis and other native species associated with grassland habitats springing up from the seed bank now that these sun-blocking shrubs have been removed. However, our most ambitious restoration project has been the establishment of a prairie habitat on three acres of fill dirt associated with a terminated development project. Although there were already plans to seed the area with native grasses, we suggested the area might be of greater value if planted with prairie grasses and wildflowers. In the spring of 2014, we had a three-acre blank canvas. We tilled up the cover of winter rye and seeded the area with a mix of native grasses and wildflowers obtained from a nursery.

A few weeks after the 2014 spring planting the Moss Rock Preserve experienced a record rainfall, and we were concerned many of our seeds had been washed away. During the first growing season about the only flowering plants were partridge pea, which, being a legume, is a great plant for soil restoration. We spent a good bit of time that first summer

controlling ragweed and exotics in an effort to help the prairie plants become established. The fall brought seed heads of a few species of native grasses mainly in the form of switch grass. However, in the following spring, the Moss Rock prairie produced a yellow sea of lance leaf coreopsis, and goldfinches flocked in to feed on their seeds. As summer progressed a diversity of wildflowers appeared including prairie coneflower, purple bee balm, black-eyed and brown-eyed susan. Fall produced a number of asters as well as a variety of native grasses including Indian grass and big bluestem. We expect some other species such as pale purple coneflower to bloom during the next growing season. Following the initial seeding we followed up with some fall enrichment plantings including royal catchfly, button blazing star, rattlesnake master, Mohr's silphium, and Mexican hat purchased from Blackjack Nursery. Considering the site is composed of fill dirt that contains a lot of asphalt debris, it will be interesting to see how well these seedlings do on the site's poor, dry soil. Overall, the prairie plants on the Moss Rock site have done quite well despite some illegal intrusion over the area by ATVs. A foot trail and interpretive signage will soon enhance the Moss Rock prairie site. Although still not fully developed the prairie is already being utilized by a variety of grassland/savanna/scrub birds including Field Sparrows, Blue Grosbeaks, and bluebirds.

Over the past few years the Birmingham Audubon Society and the city of Alabaster have initiated projects at Limestone Park making it more accessible and attractive to birds and birders. Much of the park consists of a unique marsh and tupelo swamp complex that provides habitat for a variety of birds including some locally uncommon species such as nesting Anhingas and King Rails. In addition to the wetland area, a significant segment of the park is an old pasture dominated by exotic fescue which grades into a wet meadow. These habitats support wintering and migratory grassland birds, such as meadowlarks, Bobolinks and Wilson's Snipe, which are uncommon in the Birmingham area. After our experience at Moss Rock we felt the establishment of some native Alabama prairie would further increase the park's biodiversity and enhance it as a bird habitat. During the late spring of 2014, the City had several truck-loads of dirt dumped in Limestone Park, and the city managers agreed to spread some of it out over a half-acre area. For the remainder of the summer we herbicided the site, with the objective of establishing a weed-free seed bed, and collected prairie plant seeds from various loca-

tions within the state. These seeds, including some purchased from a nursery, were stratified in a sand and perlite mix and, in November, spread over the prepared site. Volunteers covered the site with a protective layer of straw and set out some potted wildflower plants in one corner of the prairie site. The seeds of many prairie plant species require stratification and freeze and thaw before they will germinate. Planting the site in the late fall season provided these conditions and by mid spring of 2015 we were rewarded with a profusion of blooming native coreopsis, Indian blanket and Mexican hat.

However, a wet early spring turned into a two-month dry spell in May and June. While watering the Moss Rock prairie was not an option, a pond adjacent to the Limestone prairie site offered a chance to help the Limestone prairie get established. The problem was how to get the water from the pond to the prairie. We ultimately purchased a pump and hose system. After a normal nine-to-five work day we would meet to water the prairie at least once a week through the dry spells of early summer and during an unusually dry fall. The water was distributed by a two-inch fire hose we moved around the prairie by hand. Hopefully, the prairie is now established well enough that additional watering will not be needed. However, these watering efforts combined with some selective weeding, produced an unbelievably thick cover of bright wildflowers during the first growing season, including the above mentioned species as well as woodland sunflower, orange coneflower, Mohr's silphium and prairie blazing star. During the fall some seed heads of Indian grass and big bluestem emerged. Goldfinches, sparrows, butterflies, native bees and other native pollinators loved this mixture of native plants.

We hope to expand the Limestone Prairie and enrich the Moss Rock prairie with additional local seed and seedling sources. However, the challenge will be how to maintain the diversity of these prairies. We know we can use mowing to keep woody invaders out, but we hope eventually to persuade those in charge of these public lands to allow the use of controlled burns to foster these plants' natural cycles. While these prairie restoration projects may not be large enough to significantly influence local bird populations, they will improve habitat for grassland birds and native pollinators. These prairie restorations may be most valuable in that they give people an opportunity to see once locally common species such as big bluestem and prairie coneflower as well as foster support for other prairie/savanna restoration projects in Alabama.

A River of Shearwaters

PAT AND I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to travel to California for a Field Guides-led "Slice of California" pelagic birding trip. As we neared Half Moon Bay where we were to meet the boat, the weather forecast for the day at sea was very iffy with fairly high winds and seas. It was touch-and-go as to whether we'd get to leave the port, but we prepared to go. One participant, a Floridian who considered himself a seaman, lost his temper. The gist of his rant was that it was stupid to go out tomorrow, and he was not setting foot onto a boat with the group.

Pat and I attached our motion sickness patches and went to bed, ready for the adventure the next morning.

As we started out of the marina in Half Moon Bay on the 53-foot *New Captain Pete*, we swiveled our heads back and forth so much, they were in danger of coming uncorked. The breakwaters were covered in Western, California, and Heermann's Gulls, Brown Pelicans, and a host of others, including all three cormorants, a few Black Oystercatchers, and one Glaucous-winged Gull spotted by a Canadian named François, who has the best eye of any birder I've ever seen. The star of the show was a Northern Gannet that flew right across the stern, also spotted first by François. This is apparently the first state and Pacific record of a Northern Gannet. It first appeared in the summer of 2012 and has been hanging around the central California coast ever since, but the chances of us actually seeing the bird were astronomical. Just another reason that birders do what they do.

Before we had been on the water more than a few minutes, just as we cleared



the breakwaters, we were astounded to see a "river" of Sooty Shearwaters. They flew past the boat at an altitude of about 30 inches above sea level in a seemingly unending stream. Estimates ranged from 80,000 to 100,000 birds. It was one of the most incredible events I've ever witnessed. Pat and I saw that river the next two days as well. They were flying north along the coast on all three days, from where and to where, I do not know.

The seas were high, but not too bad; we never felt in the least bit of danger, and I do not think that we would have launched had there been dangerous

seas or winds. Chris, our guide, had encouraged layers, because the California waters are cool. I wore four layers and never removed a layer all day, but neither was I cold.

The Farallon National Wildlife Refuge is a group of islands located 28 miles west of San Francisco. It sustains the largest sea bird breeding colony south of Alaska and contains 30 percent of California's nesting sea birds. Thirteen species,

adding up to one-quarter of a million individuals, breed here, including the largest colonies of Brandt's Cormorant and Western Gull found anywhere.

The refuge contains more than 50 percent of the world's entire Ashy-storm Petrel population, a declining "species of management concern," whose breeding range is restricted to California. Thousands of endangered California Brown Pelicans disperse from breeding sites further south to roost and feed on the refuge. Six seal or sea lion species breed or haul out to rest on the Farallon Islands.

The original plan was not to try for the Farallons because of the seas, but





Above: Bob and Pat Reed were astounded to see a “river” of Sooty Shearwaters, estimated at 80,000 to 100,000 birds, just beyond Half Moon Bay off the central California coast.

Opposite page: A Black-footed Albatross soars gracefully over the Pacific Ocean. (Photographs by Col. Bob Reed)

when we got word of two species of boobies, Brown Booby and Blue-footed Booby, the die was cast. Arriving at the island, the Brown Boobies were easy to spot; there were at least 100 of them. The lone Blue-footed Booby was a little more difficult to locate, but once found, impossible to ignore. We wallowed in the seas, slowing turning about so everyone had choice looks.

We also had great looks and photos of Black-footed Albatross, Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemot, Marbled Murrelet, Rhinoceros Auklet, Tufted Puffin, Pink-footed Shearwater and not so great looks at Ashy and Black Storm-Petrels. The Storm-Petrels would fly very low over the water and disappear down in the valley between waves. Sometimes we were able to relocate them, but often their disappearing act was

final. I enjoyed this pelagic trip more than any other except the one in Alaska. The star of the show was the tens of thousands of Sooty Shearwaters—a river of shearwaters, going on and on and on for hours. I have never seen anything like it except one immense flock of American Robins and two or three mixed flocks of blackbirds. But to say that a flock of even the same number of robins is equal to a river of shearwaters is comparing, well, robins to shearwaters, and there’s no comparison for this man whose feet are firmly planted on terra firma.

As we reentered the harbor, we were greeted by a large flock of Elegant Terns. Pat and I had seen one Elegant Tern before in our lives, so a flock of a couple hundred of them was really super.

When we got ready to go to dinner, we learned that the Floridian had gone home. My guess was that he’d embarrassed himself to the point that he didn’t want to face us.

It was absolutely the best day of birding we’ve had in the Lower 48.

AOS SPRING MEETING, APRIL 15-17, 2016

Spring Meeting Report

By KEN HARE



MEMBERS OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL Society were able to spot almost 45 percent of all the birds recognized as occurring in Alabama at their spring meeting on Dauphin Island. Included in the combined count for the 70-plus AOS birders were several hard-to-spot birds for the state, including a Bachman's Sparrow, a Least Bittern, and a Black-Billed Cuckoo. But the stars of the show were the warblers.

"The meeting of the Alabama Ornithological Society on Dauphin Island was wonderful," said AOS member Larry Gardella. "Great birds were all over the island." Larry and Andrea "each saw 20 species of warbler—21 in all as I missed the Black-throated Green and she the Blackburnians," he said.

The meeting started with an early morning walk on Friday, and ended when many of the birders gathered at noon Sunday for a compilation of all the species spotted. When the count was done, the AOS members had seen 194 different species of birds.

AOS member Andrew Haffenden, an ardent champion of birding on Dauphin Island, pointed out that Alabama has 450 recognized bird species in the state, almost half of all the 914 recognized species in the nation.

"It works out that over 20 percent of all the birds ever recorded in the U.S. were seen in a 60-hour period in just two counties in Alabama, and the majority of those were seen on an island effectively for birders about seven miles long and half a mile wide," Haffenden said.

In addition to many shorebirds, several AOS members saw a Magnificent Frigatebird flying over the Dauphin Island airport.

One of the stars of the meeting was a Least Bittern, North America's smallest bird in the heron-egret-bittern family. The Least is an uncommon and highly secretive bird that is usually very difficult to photograph—though this one, at the Audubon Sanctuary on Dauphin Island, was unusually cooperative. As word spread among members, a steady stream

of birders could be seen on the boardwalk in the Sanctuary heading to the pond observation deck, where the Least Bittern could be seen just a few feet away for two days.

Another bird that attracted a lot of attention was the Painted Bunting. Several were spotted around the island, but the best location to see them was at Cadillac Park—especially at the back of the park in the yard of AOS members Dena and Don McKee. Don regularly spreads food throughout his yard to attract birds so that birders in the park can see them.

The yard was filled with Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks, with a few Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks showing up as well. Warblers were spotted in the trees and Ovenbirds in the bushes, but the three or four Painted Buntings that popped in and out of the yard for the three days of the meeting seemed to be the primary goal of the birders. Thanks to Dena and Don for inviting so many birders into their yard and making it so attractive for birds.

But the birding for AOS members wasn't just about Dauphin Island. A Friday morning field excursion took members to the Splinter Hill Bog Preserve in northern Baldwin County. This is a magical place—home to long-leaf pines and five species of insect-eating pitcher plants.

The Splinter Hill Bog Preserve would be well worth visiting if there were no birds at all, but there were birds—one in particular. Almost from the moment AOS members stepped from their cars, they heard the call of a Bachman's Sparrow, an uncommon and secretive bird that can be difficult to spot even when you know it is there. The Bachman's Sparrow managed to elude the birders throughout most of their walk, but on returning to the parking area Larry Gardella followed the call and there it was—uncommonly perching on a limb and calling instead of nestling in cover as usual.

The return trip included stops at 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, where birders saw soaring Swallow-tailed Kites and a Bald Eagle, and Meaher State Park on Mobile Bay. On Meaher's elevated walkway over a section of the bay, members got



The AOS spring meeting kicked off with a field trip to the Ruth McClellan Abronski Splinter Hill Bog Preserve near Perdido to see the pitcher plants. (Photograph by Robin McDonald)

a close-up look at a Common Gallinule and Mottled Ducks—but also two alligators, including one full-sized adult and a juvenile about two feet long.

After lunch at Felix's Restaurant on the causeway—with binoculars in common use while AOS members waited on the meals—the birders returned to Dauphin Island.

On Friday evening, speaker Kimball Garrett addressed some of his favorite misidentifications of birds. On Saturday evening, Garrett spoke on how non-native bird species become introduced in North America and how those species that are becoming established are impacting the ecology and native birds. Garrett is the ornithology collections manager at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and is a co-author of the *Peterson Field Guide to Warblers of North America*. In addition to his lectures, Garrett also accompanied

field trips on Friday and Saturday, sharing his knowledge with other birders. Garrett regularly protested that he was not good at recognizing many eastern birds, but he proved in the field to be quite adept despite his protestations.

On Saturday morning, Andrew Haffenden led birders along the beach to see shorebirds while Garrett led other AOS members around hotspots on the island to see warblers and other migratory birds.

Those two field trips were followed by a gathering of AOS members at the Dauphin Island home of John and Jenny Stowers of Montgomery, who treated the group to what may well be the Gulf Coast's finest homemade seafood gumbo.

As usual, the Friday evening potluck was a big success, with lots of shrimp and homemade goodies from members. In addition, lots of positive comments could be heard Saturday evening on the quality of the catering.

In a Facebook post, Larry Gardella summed the three days up quite well—great birds, good food and “socializing with friends who also love birds.”

DAUPHIN ISLAND, APRIL 16, 2016

Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By KEN WARD, *Secretary*



THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY met on Saturday, April 16, 2016, at Dauphin Island, Alabama. President Anne G. Miller called the meeting to order at 2:10 p.m. A quorum was present. The winter 2016 Board Meeting minutes were unanimously approved by the Board.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Elberta Reid was welcomed as the new treasurer. A detailed statement of the AOS bank account was circulated to board members for the first quarter 2016, with beginning balance of \$10,462.16 and ending balance of \$12,185.85.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

AOS eBird Project—The AOS board has committed to a long-term project to increase our members' reports to eBird, especially from Alabama Birding Trail sites around the state. This will include making recommendations on sites most needing attention from birders, and also promoting participation in eBird via such venues as *The Yellowhammer*, ALBirds, the AOS website and Facebook (FB) page, etc. There will be a variety of methods used to encourage e-birding, such as recognizing productive e-birders, as well as birders committing to make seasonal e-bird reports from particular Alabama birding trail sites. At a future time, we may award special T-shirts, caps, or buttons to regular participants.

New Website—We are moving forward with development of a new website. The use of WordPress would make possible revisions to the website by multiple administrators using MSWord. Currently, only the webmaster can make changes, and the website is badly out of date. Ken Ward reviewed the website for problems and found a number of issues, including broken links, outdated information, needs for reorganization, etc. There is a need for a comprehensive redesign to make the website more attractive and intuitively

easier to negotiate and use. Kathy Hicks, our webmaster, offered to coordinate the update/redesign of our website for \$500. In addition to updating existing material on the website, a comprehensive state-wide calendar of birding field trips and related events will be added. This will drive traffic to our website on a regular basis, and should help to increase AOS membership. The website will also be linked to the AOS FB page and other relevant FB sites.

The new website project will be tackled in two separate stages. Stage 1, from May to June 30, will be carried out by AOS board members. We will work on developing a site plan for the new website, and then will update, rewrite, or if necessary, create new material to be used on each page of the new website. In July and August, Kathy Hicks will use the site plan and material we have produced to create the new website. It should be ready by September 1, in time to be used for registration for the Fall Meeting.

Point of Business—The board unanimously approved a payment of \$500 to Kathy Hicks for her work to create the new website, and a reserve fund of \$500 for expenses related to the creation of the new website.

VICE-PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Photo Contest—Harry Dean, chair of the Photo Contest Committee tasked with designing and managing the contest, made a brief presentation on the photo contest planned for the Fall 2016 meeting. There was a discussion of recommendations, including judges, deadlines, photo categories, awards, etc. Greg Jackson suggested adding a category in digiscoping. The board was supportive of the plan presented, which will be finalized over the next few weeks, including identifying the judges.

Point of Business—The board approved a cash prize of \$50 for best of show, with free memberships for other awards, with final decisions pending by the Photo Contest Committee within these parameters.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Education (Shirley Farrell)—AOS will again become a partner and sponsor for Alabama Green Ribbon Schools. Don Self is making birdhouses to give to schools. A. H. Watwood Elementary School of Talladega County Schools, and the University of Montevallo were the two winning schools in Alabama this year.

In the event that Birmingham Audubon decides to stop managing the Flying WILD curriculum, AOS Education Committee would like to provide books and workshops for Flying WILD.

The Montgomery Public Schools Arboretum and Nature Center has requested funding to sponsor birdseed for their new 3rd grade nature-oriented curriculum so they can maintain birdfeeders at the center. The Education Committee would like to contribute \$200 from funds already raised by and for the Education Committee. Shirley Farrell has committed to visiting the Nature Center and offering advice on placing and managing the feeders and providing information on basics of bird recognition.

Point of Business—The board unanimously approved \$200 of AOS Education Committee funds to purchase bird-feeding supplies for the Montgomery Public Schools Arboretum and Nature Center.

Membership Services (Bianca Allen)—The committee is gathering information on members who are overdue to determine who is deceased, incapacitated, etc. Board was in agreement.

Membership Recruitment (Larry Gardella)—On behalf of AOS, Larry has been actively participating in various social media, such as ALBirds and Birding Alabama (FB), providing information and identification of birds for other participants, and generally keeping an AOS presence on FB.

Public Relations Committee (Lisa Gardner)—There is a need to rise in collective awareness of AOS; to this end the AOS FB page has been used more intensively to advertise AOS in recent months. More photos are being posted on the FB page as well as information on trips, meeting tidbits, and other promotions via nature-oriented columns (e.g., Ken Hare) are being shared there, etc.

Social Media (Carrie Threadgill)—Social media has been the main instrument in raising awareness of AOS (see Public Relations, above); she reported 100 new likes on the FB

page (a 30% increase). Carrie requested photos from AOS meetings be emailed to her during and after the meeting, to be placed on the FB page and to make some official photographs for the meeting (member group shots, etc.) that can be disseminated for PR via the FB page and other FB groups through sharing. She also encouraged submitting videos. Publicizing meeting activities in a timely fashion is a good way to get out the word on AOS.

Meetings Committee (Rufina Ward)—Rufina agreed to chair the Meetings Committee. Rufina thanked Anne Miller (past committee chair) for assisting in preparing for the spring meeting.

Online (Kathy Hicks)—No report; however, see earlier comments during president's report regarding development of new website and approval of funding to support the effort **Censusing/Checklists** (Greg Jackson)—Checklists have been updated but it may be best to wait until anticipated updated taxonomical information from AOU is available in July for inclusion.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Fort Morgan Management Plan (Greg Jackson)—Greg reported that the Fort Morgan Management Plan has been approved. The plan is a partnership between AOS and the Fort Morgan Historical Commission, and focuses on management of natural history resources associated with Fort Morgan. AOS role in implementation could include some funding and labor to help with management. Examples include providing signage to explain to public what some areas are used/managed for, and why (possible resources to support signage from birding trails; Anne to check on this), continued monitoring of vegetative regeneration in burned areas, funding and labor support for plantings, etc. There was unanimous agreement that AOS should place a commemorative bench for Bob Sargent in the Fort Morgan stable area. Greg solicited additional thoughts and ideas toward how AOS can do its share to support this effort.

Separate times for Board meetings? There was an informal discussion concerning possibly conducting the board meetings separate from regular AOS meetings, given their length and the time taken away from other meeting activities. There seemed to be a good deal of support for this, but no consensus. Probably should be discussed further.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45 pm.

2016 AOS Spring Meeting Compilation List Dauphin Island, April 15–17

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE weekend included Glossy Ibis, Great Black-backed Gull and Black-headed Grosbeak.

Canada Goose
Wood Duck
Gadwall
Mallard
Mottled Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Red-breasted Merganser
Northern Bobwhite
Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
Magnificent Frigatebird
Northern Gannet
Double-crested Cormorant
American White Pelican
Brown Pelican
Least Bittern
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
Red-tailed Hawk
Clapper Rail
King Rail
Virginia Rail
Sora
Common Gallinule

American Coot
American Oystercatcher
Black-bellied Plover
Snowy Plover
Wilson's Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Piping Plover
Killdeer
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Willet
Lesser Yellowlegs
Whimbrel
Marbled Godwit
Ruddy Turnstone
Red Knot
Sanderling
Dunlin
Least Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Bonaparte's Gull
Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Least Tern
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Common Tern
Forster's Tern
Royal Tern
Sandwich Tern
Black Skimmer
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
White-winged Dove
Mourning Dove
Common Ground-Dove
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Black-billed Cuckoo
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
Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
Great Crested Flycatcher
Eastern Kingbird
Loggerhead Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Black-whiskered Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
N. Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Barn Swallow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Brown-headed Nuthatch
House Wren
Marsh Wren
Carolina Wren
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
Veery
Gray-cheeked Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
Wood Thrush
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Brown Thrasher
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
Ovenbird
Worm-eating Warbler
Louisiana Waterthrush
Northern Waterthrush
Blue-winged Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Prothonotary Warbler
Swainson's Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Kentucky Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Hooded Warbler
American Redstart
Cape May Warbler
Northern Parula

Blackburnian Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Palm Warbler
Pine Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Prairie Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Eastern Towhee
Bachman's Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
Northern Cardinal
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Black-headed Grosbeak
Blue Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting
Painted Bunting
Bobolink
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Boat-tailed Grackle
Shiny Cowbird
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.

AOS Photography Contest

HAVE YOU NOTICED THAT OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS MORE and more people are taking photographs as a part of their birding activity? Well there is exciting news. The first ever AOS photography contest will be held this year with the winners announced at the Fall 2016 meeting. The contest is open to all AOS members in good standing. The official rules and submission information can be found on the AOS website and Facebook page. The categories are simple for this first contest and are focused on equipment: SLR, point and shoot, and digiscoping, with an additional category for those sixteen and under. Photographs taken in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle within the last two years are eligible as long as the pictured bird is alive and living in the wild. By submitting an entry, you agree to allow AOS to use the photographs on the AOS website and Facebook page without compensation to promote the contest. So, we have some rules, we have an entry form, we have some judges, and we have some nominal prizes (as if the honor of participating and winning wouldn't be enough). Now what we need are your photographs in jpeg format only. Submit to Ken Ward at phinken@wowway.com in accordance with the official rules and entry form. Note that an entry form must accompany each submission. Now this next sentence is really important. All entries must be received on or before September 1, 2016.

—Harry Dean

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.

Electronic Yellowhammer?

IT COSTS WELL OVER A DOLLAR AND A HALF TO PRINT AND MAIL *The Yellowhammer*. We are delivering, on a 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.

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.

New Members

Richard and Debra Beil

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Fall 2016	August 10, 2016
Winter 2016	November 10, 2016
Spring 2017	February 10, 2017

Upcoming Meetings

SECOND FRIDAY—October 14-16, 2016
Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 27-29, 2017
Lake Guntersville State Park

THIRD FRIDAY—April 21-23, 2017
Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

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



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