

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 38, NO. 4 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY WINTER 2018

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

FOUNDED 1952



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MEETINGS

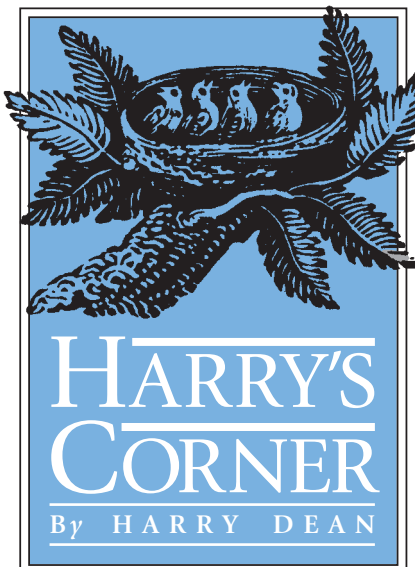
Kathryn Palmore
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AS I WRITE THIS, FALL MIGRATION is winding down, and more and more winter visitors are showing up. Ducks, geese, cranes, and sparrows are present in small numbers but getting more numerous each day. The robins are stripping the dogwood trees and the mornings are crisp. By the time you read this, there will be thousands of Sandhill Cranes on the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge and several hundred Snow Geese on Limestone Bay. Similar scenarios will be playing out in your part of the world as well. Winter is definitely on the way.

Every now and then, I believe an organization needs to take a look at how well it is performing its functions and purposes. Fortunately for AOS the reasons for existence are clearly laid out in the AOS Articles of Incorporation. It should be noted that AOS is organized exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes.

The specific purposes are laid out in Article III. They are: (a) To promote the study of, and a greater appreciation of, birds found in Alabama and northwest Florida and the habitats in which they are found; (b) To encourage the protection and conservation of birds and the natural areas where they are found; (c) To engage in educational activities to advance knowledge of birds and their habitats; (d) To educate persons in schools and other organizations and groups about birds, natural resources, and conservation; (e) To encourage, and to engage in, activities directed toward the conservation of birds and protection of their habitats and to advance education about the need for, and means of, conservation of the same; (f) To acquire materials relating to birds and conservation for educational purposes; (g) To acquire nature centers, natural areas, or other real property with habitat critical to migrant or resident birds; (h) To establish, or to assist with establishing, birding trails and nature trails and to disseminate information about those birding trails and other areas important to birds and the birds found in those areas; (i) To conduct, or to collaborate in conducting counts, censuses, and surveys of birds; (j) To conduct, encourage, and support research, studies, and other activities pertaining to all species of birds found in Alabama and northwest Florida and to disseminate



information about such research, studies, and other activities; and (k) To make gifts and other donations of services, personal property, or real property to other organizations and institutions including, but not limited to, municipal corporations or other political subdivisions, agencies, or departments for educational, scientific, or other charitable purposes.

I don't intend to assess each of these functions here. Rather, I am asking each standing committee chair and individual AOS member to think about how we are meeting our purpose statements as listed above. I can see opportunities for people to be involved in many of these functions

by working in their local areas, especially in the areas of bird conservation awareness and education. I once had a narrow-minded idea about the purpose of the "volunteer" check box on the membership application. I now see that it is not just about volunteering to serve on a formal committee, although that would be welcome. It is about looking for opportunities in your local bird patch, schools, and communities to further the purposes of AOS. With the engagement of more of our members, we can have a greater impact across the entire state of Alabama.

Switching gears to meetings, I would say that the fall meeting was well attended by people as well as birds. It seems as though no matter how well we have planned, we continue to be faced with challenges in terms of our meeting venue. Tropical storm Gordon damaged the HVAC system at the Shelby Center, and repairs were not completed in time for our meeting. Fortunately, the Dauphin Island United Methodist Church kept us on their schedule. We are thankful for their continued support. Kathryn Palmore, your Event Coordinator, and Dana and Sue Timmons did an outstanding job putting the meeting together. I also saw many people jump in and lend a hand where needed before and especially after the meeting. The danger in mentioning names is that I will forget someone. Thank you to everyone who helped make the meeting a success.

Our speaker, Dr. Jared Wolfe, provided a fascinating look at the culture, politics, and birds of Equatorial Guinea. In addition to being a dynamic speaker, he is an excellent birder,

and I am sure all would agree that it was a pleasure to bird with him. I would also like to thank Jennie Stowers for hosting us on Saturday. Once again, the tomatoes and fudge did not disappoint. Of course, the Bald Eagle in the nearby pine tree and numerous raptor flybys didn't hurt either. I could sit on that porch all day.

As much fun as the fall meeting was, I am really looking forward to the 2019 winter meeting. The meeting will be held at Joe Wheeler State Park near Rogersville, Alabama, on January 25-27, 2019. Our banquet speaker will be Dr. Conor McGowan who will speak on shorebird conservation. You can learn more about him later in this issue. Field trips will be similar to those we have done in the past in this area. Final field trip planning is underway at this time. Currently, we are looking at Saturday trips to the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Waterloo area and Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge, in addition to a boat trip on Wilson Lake. Please note that the Wheeler refuge trip will have a strict limit of 30 people (the first 30 to sign up) and we will need to carpool in the refuge. A signup is also required for the boat trip, and there will be an additional charge. On Sunday, there will be a trip around the park as well as some of the local areas or

you can bird on your own. If you arrive early, there are several places nearby to bird. You will find them listed in this issue. I look forward to seeing you at the meeting!

Please check the AOS website (aosbirds.org) and/or Facebook page for last minute changes, notices, etc. regarding the meeting. It is impractical at this time to send people individual email notifications. We are working on it. However, to make it work, we will need to have your current email address. I will talk more about that at a later time.

I couldn't end this without saying a few words about membership dues. Membership dues are due in January for the 2019 calendar year. The perfect time to renew is when you register for the winter meeting. You can pay dues, register for the meeting, and sign up for the banquet on the website and use PayPal to pay. If you prefer the paper method, you can use the printed form on page 15 of *The Yellowhammer*. If you are not attending the winter meeting, you can still pay dues on the website using the Join/Renew button. You can print the form from the website and mail it in if you prefer. Being confused by my explanations here is not an excuse. Please help us by paying your dues on time.

Good birding.

Electronic AOS Publications

THE AOS BOARD HAS REVISED THE POLICY GOVERNING electronic versus print editions of our publications. In the past, the default has been the print edition. The new policy states that the default will be the electronic *Yellowhammer* and *Alabama Birdlife*. As you renew your membership, unless you opt for the print edition, you will be added to the email list.

There are advantages to the new policy. First, you will not have to wait for printing and mailing, meaning that you should receive your *Yellowhammer* and *Alabama Birdlife* about two weeks sooner. Second, you will have most or all of the pictures in color. Third, you will save the society the cost of printing and mailing. Fourth, we will conserve approximately four trees a year—okay, that's a guess, but the savings will be real.

In the near future, Life members will be given an option to choose the print versions; otherwise, they will start receiving the color E-*Yellowhammer* and E-*Alabama Birdlife*.

By saving money, we will have more to use for conservation and other purposes of our charter. The board hopes you will embrace this effort to be better stewards of our resources.

If you wish to change to the E-*Yellowhammer* and E-*Alabama Birdlife* immediately, please notify our Treasurer, Joan Dixon (joanwsdixon@gmail.com).

2019 Dues Are Due as of January 1, 2019

I AM PLEASED TO SEE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE recently joined AOS. Welcome to you all. I look forward to birding with you at a future AOS meeting or maybe at one of the upcoming Christmas counts. I also hope to keep seeing current members, including those of you who have not yet renewed. Please check on your *Yellowhammer* to see if you are due (or past due) on dues and, if you are, please renew. You can renew or join by mailing the form in the back of *The Yellowhammer* or online at www.aosbirds.org.

—Larry Gardella

Audubon Christmas Bird Counts in Alabama and Surrounding States, 2018–2019

Audubon Christmas bird counts for Alabama and nearby Georgia, Florida, and Tennessee are listed below. Additional information is available at www.AOSbirds.org.

1. Waterloo, AL—December 15, 2018

Paul Kittle (256-627-2376; pdkittle@una.edu)

2. Dauphin Island, AL—December 15, 2018

Howard Horne (hhorne@bvaenviro.com)

Teams cover Dauphin Island as well as part of the south Mobile County mainland.

3. Wheeler NWR, Decatur, AL—December 15, 2018

Dwight Cooley (256-565-6239, sabrewing@earthlink.net) See NABS schedule at www.northalbirding.com for more information

4. Pensacola, FL—December 15, 2018

Daniel Stangeland, (dpstang71@hotmail.com, 850-686-3502)

5. Auburn, AL—December 15, 2018

Geoff Hill (334-332-4930; ghill@auburn.edu)

6. Cullman, AL—December 16, 2018

Vince Meleski (256-739-4589, vmeleski@charter.net or vincemeleski@outlook.com) Counters meet at Culpepper Real Estate (601 7th Ave SW, Cullman, AL 35055, close to the Post Office) to assign areas to be covered. This count is frequently short-handed, so we hope some of you will consider helping out. Those who want to help for part of the day (morning or afternoon) can also participate. We will re-meet for compilation at 5:00 pm at Karma's Coffee House (103 1st Ave NE, Cullman, AL 35055).

7. Tuscaloosa, AL—December 16, 2018

David Arnold (205-792-0653)

8. Choctawatchee Bay, FL—December 17, 2018

Alan Knothe (850-208-1780, birdman6419@gmail.com; email is best)

9. Eufaula NWR (ALEU), Eufaula, AL—December 18, 2018

Mason Jarrett (beltedkingfisher2000@yahoo.com) Sign up on the CBC website at netapp.audubon.org/cbc/public/, or by email.

10. Buffalo River, Lawrenceburg, TN—Dec. 18, 2018

Damien Simbeck (256-856-3079; tnbarredowl@aol.com)

11. Birmingham, AL—December 22, 2018

Paul Franklin (phfranklin36@gmail.com; 205-542-7647) Compilation will begin at 5:30 pm at the Birmingham Audubon Society office, 3720 4th Avenue South, second floor (park and enter at the rear of the building).

12. Guntersville, AL—December 26, 2018

Linda Reynolds (256-582-2970, lreynolds@charter.net) We have 8 parties and the area covers a lot of lakeshore as well as upland and woodland terrain. We usually start around 7 a.m. and conclude with a supper compilation around 5 p.m. at the Guntersville Library. See NABS schedule at www.northalbirding.com for more information.

13. Savannah, TN—December 27, 2018 (tentative)

Damien Simbeck (256-856-3079; tnbarredowl@aol.com) Meet at 5:30 am at McDonalds in Savannah (corner of Hwy 64 and 128)

14. Fort Morgan, AL—December 29, 2018

Larry Gardella (334-450-9790 (C); lgardellabirds@charter.net)

15. Montgomery, AL—January 2, 2019

Carrie Threadgill (334-242-3864, carrie.threadgill@dcnr.alabama.gov)

16. Wheeler Dam, Lauderdale/Lawrence Counties, AL—January 2, 2019

Damien Simbeck, leader (256-856-3079; tnbarredowl@aol.com) Damien Simbeck is hoping to begin a new Christmas Bird Count here in North Alabama, centered near Wheeler Dam. Per National Audubon Society recommendations, we will make a dry run this year, then officially start the count next year.

17. Columbus, GA (ALEU)—January 3, 2019

Mason Jarrett (706-992-8864; beltedkingfisher2000@yahoo.com) Sign up on the CBC website at netapp.audubon.org/cbc/public/, or email Mason Jarrett.

18. Gulf Shores, AL—January 5, 2019

Greg Jackson and Howard Horne (hhorne@bvaenviro.com)

AOS FALL MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, OCTOBER 12-14, 2018

AOS Fall Meeting Report

By KEN HARE & GEOFF HILL

THE NINETY OR SO MEMBERS OF THE ALABAMA Ornithological Society meeting on Dauphin Island were greeted by great weather, a good turnout of a wide variety of birds, and an outstanding speaker.

The fall meeting officially kicked off at 7 a.m. Friday with a field trip across Mobile Bay to Fort Morgan, but many of the AOS birders arrived early. Their eagerness was rewarded with a very active birding day on Thursday, with migrating warblers, cuckoos, grosbeaks, tanagers, and lots of Red-breasted Nuthatches all over the Shell Mounds and Goat Tree birding sites.

Friday morning, Andrew Haffenden led a group of about forty birders on a field trip by ferry to the Fort Morgan Historical Site. The ferry was escorted most of the way across the bay by a flight of Sandwich Terns, and the group was met at the landing by a large number of Snowy Egrets and even more Red-breasted Nuthatches.

Because of the size of the group, Geoff Hill and Katie Barnes helped Andrew to lead the field trip, with all three trip

Andrew Haffenden (fifth from left) leads a group of AOS birders on a field trip to Pelican Point on Dauphin Island during the AOS winter meeting in October. (Ken Ward)



leaders taking care to help identify birds and to find those that the birders were especially interested in seeing.

The birds at the Stables area of the fort were especially numerous, with birders spotting more than ten Yellow-Billed Cuckoos, one Black-Billed Cuckoo, a variety of vireos, and several species of warblers including an uncommon Wilson's Warbler. A walk around the historic fort found a few shorebirds, and Glossy and White Ibis, and flyovers included an American White Pelican, a Bald Eagle, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. After lunch overlooking Mobile Bay, the group again took the ferry back to Dauphin Island.

Saturday brought two morning field trips. Andrew Haffenden, an expert on the shorebirds of Dauphin Island, took a large group for a walk along the Pelican Peninsula shore to see a variety of shorebirds, herons, gulls and terns. Meanwhile, another group was joined by speaker Jared Wolfe to explore sites around Dauphin Island. A highlight was a vigorous debate over a possible Black-headed Grosbeak, a great find for Dauphin Island if it turns out to be recognized. Stay tuned and check out Larry Gardella's analysis in this newsletter.

The Saturday morning field trip around Dauphin Island, led by Geoff Hill and speaker Jared Wolfe, made stops at the airport marsh, the public beach at the old fishing pier, the shell mounds, and the back side of Fort Gaines. Bird numbers were reduced compared to the previous two days, but participants were treated to nice views of Nelson's and Seaside Sparrows, Clapper Rails, many Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and two Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.

On Saturday evening, AOS members gathered for an outstanding catered meal and to hear Dr. Jared Wolfe, an author and research ornithologist, discuss his ground-breaking work in Equatorial Guinea, perhaps the least ornithologically studied country in the world. In addition to stunning photos of the birds there, Wolfe described his group's research and efforts to build a conservation ethic in a nation where none previously existed.

On Sunday, Larry Gardella led a field trip to the Blakeley Island mud lakes, where five species of ducks were located, included both Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal. A group of twenty-two AOS members birded the area for about three hours, walking about two miles and were treated to nice views of Roseate Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Marsh Wren, Yellow Warbler, Long-billed Dowitcher, and many Black-necked

Stilts and American Avocets. Mosquito numbers were way down compared to recent summer visits, so the spirits of the group were way up during the walk.

When members gathered at noon Sunday for a compilation of species, they recorded more than 160 species of birds seen in Baldwin and Mobile Counties from Friday morning until noon Sunday.

Actions of the Fall 2018 AOS Board of Directors Meeting

By JEAN FOLSOM, *Secretary*

ACTION—Minutes of the spring 2018 meeting unanimously approved as written.

ACTION—The board voted unanimously for AOS to donate \$10,000 to Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary (DIBS), contingent on DIBS matching our donation, and the total matched one-to-one by Pelican Coast Conservancy, thus amounting to a total of \$30,000, for the specific purpose of purchasing additional land on Dauphin Island.

ACTION—The board voted to eliminate the defunct Online Services committee.

ACTION—AOS will support the DIBS/Dan C. Holliman Research Fund by allocating \$2,000 to provide two grants of up to \$1,000 each to do ornithological research with an Alabama connection.

POINT OF BUSINESS—The photography contest will be replaced with a Featured AOS Photographer project.

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Spring 2019

February 10, 2019

Summer 2019

May 10, 2019

Two Birds at the Shell Mounds: An Analysis

By LARRY GARDELLA



HERE WAS A BIT OF CONFUSION AROUND THE SHELL Mounds about two of the birds that showed up during the AOS fall meeting. I hope this brief article helps in future identifications.

First, among the many cuckoos at the Shell Mounds, there was at least one that had rufous in the primaries, very little white on the undertail and a hooked bill smaller than that of a typical Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Some called the bird Black-billed, but others said it was a Yellow-billed because of the rufous in the primaries. Black-billed Cuckoos are far less common in fall than Yellow-billed, but they are not rare.

Juvenile Yellow-billed Cuckoos have bills that are black; they have only a limited amount of white in the tail; and they have rufous in the primaries. For the most part, they have this look only through August. At least the vast majority of Yellow-billed Cuckoos in August should have at least some yellow in the bill, but it is possible that a late-hatched bird might not show yellow in October. Juvenile Yellow-billed Cuckoos have more white or whitish in the undertail than Black-billed Cuckoos have, and the white is in fairly large spots like those in adults, though less contrasting with the rest of the undertail, and not the thin horizontal spots on Black-billed Cuckoos. Yellow-billed Cuckoos also have larger bills than Black-billed, although a really young bird, late-hatched, could have a bit of a smaller bill. In distinguishing the two species it is helpful to consider that young BBCU often are fairly buffy on the throat and undertail coverts, and adults should show some red around the eye.

The first Black-billed Cuckoo I ever saw was at the "Magic Hedges" in Chicago. It had rufous in the primaries. Several expert birders told me that the black bill was more significant than the rufous. I believe the bird in question at Shell Mounds was a Black-billed Cuckoo because of the color, size and shape of the bill and the white in the undertail being limited to small, well-separated skinny horizontal rectangles,

The other bird that fooled some people (including me) was at least one grosbeak that had a bicolored bill, did not show

any red on the breast, had a brown crown stripe and much buff on the eye stripe, and did not show streaking on the sides of the upper breast. Posts of a photo of this bird on the Facebook Advanced ID site led most commenters to identify the bird as Black-headed. It turns out, however, that none of these field marks is sufficient, alone or in combination, to identify an out-of-range grosbeak as a Black-headed, which is quite rare in Alabama in fall and winter. The best marker for a Black-headed Grosbeak is a total absence of red in the wing (arm) pits. The bird in question was most likely a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, but I left it as Black-headed/Rose-breasted Grosbeak in eBird, since I could not rule out Black-headed.

I thank Greg Jackson for expert guidance on the identification questions. Any errors in this article are mine, not his.

Hummingbird Warriors

A FRIEND RELATED TO ME THE FOLLOWING STORY. IN EARLY August, a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird had been frequenting one feeder in particular for more than an hour, but a bumblebee was also fond of the same feeder and kept harassing the hummer. After being chased away one too many times, the hummer flew up behind the bee, moved slightly to the side, and began beating the bumblebee with its wings. After a second or two, the bumblebee fell to the ground out of sight.

Speculation: Did the hummer break the bee's wing?

A few days earlier, I observed a Ruby-throat chasing a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher all over our backyard. The Gnatcatcher was clearly trying to get away from the hummer, even flying into clumps of leaves in an attempt to hide. After trying the cover of several trees, the Gnatcatcher left the yard, flew into the deeper woods, and disappeared. The hummer returned to the feeders, evidently satisfied that the menace was gone.

In late October, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird was attacked by a yellow jacket and went to the ground where it stayed for more than a minute. It then flew off in the direction it had been using for several days, appearing to suffer no more consequences. It was not seen again. As it was very late in the season, whether it died or continued migration, and whether it was actually stung or not remains a mystery.

I love birds; they never cease to entertain.

—Bob Reed

2018 AOS Fall Meeting Compilation List Dauphin Island, Alabama, October 12–14

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE WEEKEND INCLUDED GREATER Black-backed Gull and Black-headed Grosbeak. Count total was 170 species.

Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
Mallard
Mottled Duck
Green-winged Teal
Pied-billed Grebe
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
White-winged Dove
Mourning Dove
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Black-billed Cuckoo
Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Clapper Rail
Sora
Common Gallinule
American Coot
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
American Oystercatcher
Black-bellied Plover
Snowy Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Piping Plover
Killdeer
Marbled Godwit
Ruddy Turnstone
Red Knot
Sanderling
Dunlin
Least Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Lesser Yellowlegs
Willet
Greater Yellowlegs
Bonaparte's Gull

Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Caspian Tern
Common Tern
Forster's Tern
Royal Tern
Sandwich Tern
Black Skimmer
Magnificent Frigatebird
Northern Gannet
Double-crested Cormorant
American White Pelican
Brown Pelican
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
Roseate Spoonbill
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Barred Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Least Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Loggerhead Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Tree Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Barn Swallow
Carolina Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Brown-headed Nuthatch
House Wren
Marsh Wren
Carolina Wren
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
Gray-cheeked Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
Wood Thrush
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Brown Thrasher
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
House Sparrow
House Finch
Eastern Towhee
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Nelson's Sparrow
Seaside Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow

Baltimore Oriole
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Boat-tailed Grackle
Ovenbird
Northern Waterthrush
Black-and-white Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Orange-crowned Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
American Redstart
Northern Parula
Magnolia Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Black-throated Blue Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Palm Warbler
Pine Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Prairie Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Wilson's Warbler
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
Northern Cardinal
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Black-headed Grosbeak
Blue Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting
Dickcissel

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 WINTER MEETING, JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, JANUARY 25 - 27, 2019

AOS Winter Meeting Schedule



UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL ACTIVITIES BEGIN or occur at the Joe Wheeler State Park Lodge, 4401 McLean Drive, Rogersville, Alabama 35652.

To register online for the Winter Meeting, go to:
<http://www.aosbirds.org/aos-meeting-registration>

FRIDAY, January 25, 2019

Birding on your own if you arrive early

3:00 p.m. Registration—Cypress Room

5:00 p.m. Social Hour—Cypress Room

6:00 p.m. Dinner from menu in the Lodge Dining Room

7:00 p.m. Member's Slides—Cypress Room

8:00 p.m. Adjourn

SATURDAY, January 26, 2019

7:00 a.m. Field Trips—Meet in the Lodge Lobby

Field Trip 1: Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (requires advance signup. Limit 30)

Field Trip 2: Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge/Waterloo

Field Trip 3: Wilson Lake Boat Trip
 (Requires advance signup and extra payment.
 Contact Damien Simbeck for details:
tnbarredowl@aol.com)

3:00 p.m. Board Meeting—Cypress Room

4:30 p.m. Registration—Cypress Room

5:30 p.m. Social Hour—Cypress Room

6:30 p.m. **BANQUET—Cypress Room**

7:15 p.m. Announcements

7:30 p.m. **KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

Dr. Conor McGowan, Shorebird Conservation

9:00 p.m. Adjourn

SUNDAY, January 27, 2019

7:30 a.m. **Field Trip**

Around the State Park/Wheeler Dam
 Trip Leader: TBD

12:00 p.m. Compilation—Cypress Room

1:00 p.m. Adjourn

ACCOMMODATIONS AND INFORMATION

Joe Wheeler State Park is about 27 miles east of Florence, Alabama, and 22 miles west of Athens on US 72 (not US 72 Alt). We have 15 rooms reserved, available through December 25, 2018.

Rooms are reserved at the lodge for a convention rate of \$69/night plus tax. The reservation numbers are 1-800-544-5639 or 256-247-5461. Please indicate that you are with AOS.

The Park also has cabins for rent near Wheeler Dam about 14 miles from the lodge. Contact info for cabins: 256-685-2656. There are also several motels in the area. If you cannot get into the Lodge, the best bet is probably the Florence quad cities area or Athens.

Note that there will be a banquet Saturday night. There will be no Friday Night Pot Luck Supper.

Websites: <https://alapark.com/joe-wheeler-state-park>

Upcoming Meetings

WINTER MEETING—January 25-27, 2019

Joe Wheeler State Park, Rogersville, Alabama

SPRING MEETING—April 19-21, 2019

Dauphin Island, Alabama

FALL MEETING—October 11-13, 2019

Dauphin Island, Alabama

A O S WINTER MEETING, JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, JANUARY 25 - 27, 2019



Birding Locations near Joe Wheeler State Park

By DAMIEN SIMBECK

EDITOR'S NOTE: Damien Simbeck was kind enough to update this list of possible places to bird if you arrive early, or if you miss a field trip.

NABT = North Alabama Birding Trail

(<http://www.northalabamabirdingtrail.com/>)

STATE PARK (NABT #3)

The road into the park from US 72 is bordered by stable habitat that has many possible birding areas. The spots mentioned here are just tastes. About 1.5 miles from US 72 check the area around the Weaver/Neeley Branch crossings for wetland species. As the road nears the lodge, check the day use area on the left and the sewage treatment pond on the right near the golf course. The mouth of First Creek as seen

Thousands of Sandhill Cranes gather at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge during the winter. The AOS winter meeting will include a field trip to the refuge. (Robin McDonald)

from behind the lodge itself has also produced nice birding in the past.

ELK RIVER AND SECOND CREEK

When leaving the park, turn right on US 72 and travel east for around 6.0 miles to the Elk River Bridge. There are several back roads and pull-offs from the main highway here that provide various views of the river. One of Alabama's first records for Little Gull was at this spot years ago, and birders traveling later to search for it found a Red Phalarope!

Backtrack west on US 72 through Rogersville to around 3.0 miles past the state park entrance, to the crossing for Second Creek. Park carefully and check both sides of the creek here for birds—the north side seems to have more. The first road on the right, west of the bridge, will parallel the water for some distance, providing a more complete afternoon view of the widened creek. Expect ducks and gulls.

WHEELER DAM (NABT #2)

From US 72 in Elgin turn south on AL 101 at signs for Wheeler Dam. Just before reaching the dam's north end, turn left and park in the small picnic parking area overlooking the upper locks. Gulls frequently accumulate here and also in groups out on the lake near the dam. The lower north locks are closed to visitors. NOTE: This area is best viewed mid to late afternoon (sun's angle). After checking this spot, continue across the dam and check the fishing access area and boat ramps below the dam reached by turning right just past the park office. Expect ducks, gulls, loons, and possibly eagles in this area. Note: the south dam overlook area is now closed to the public.

TOWN CREEK MARSH (NABT #4)

From the south end of Wheeler Dam follow AL 101 south toward Town Creek for a few miles to the intersection of County Road 314 (Foster Mill Road) at signs for Doublehead Resort. Turn right and go a few miles to where the water and cattail marsh meets the road on the right just before the T-intersection with County 40 (River Road). Stop and check here. Also turn right at County 40 and stop and check the area around the concrete bridge. Virginia Rail has wintered here and other marsh birds are to be expected. If mudflats are present winter shorebirds may be here.

WILSON DAM (NABT #6 & 7)

To continue route, return to County 40 and go west for around 10 mile to reach Wilson Dam—follow signs. (Note: To reach dam from US 72 just east of Florence, follow signs and AL 133 south). Check visitor overlooks at south end (last right and left turns just before starting over dam if traveling north on AL 133). Locks on north end are closed to visitors—no access on north end. Another spot to check is the fishing access/boat ramp area reached from AL 133 just south of

dam (follow signs at right turn). Expect gulls, diving ducks, and herons. Eagles, loons, and grebes are possible.

TVA RESERVATION NATURE TRAIL (NABT #8)

From Wilson Dam go south on AL 133 and follow Reservation Road (continue straight) at traffic light in 1.0 miles. Go another 1.6 miles to signed right turn for trail parking area. Main trail begins at back of second parking area (past restrooms). Main paved loop is around 2.5 miles long. Expect winter woodland and edge species. Eastern Screech-Owl and Barred Owl are resident.

CYPRESS CREEK WASTE TREATMENT FACILITY

(Open during operation hours Monday through Friday, occasionally and irregularly on weekends.) Continue on Reservation Road and continue to a traffic light at US 43. Turn right and follow US 43 north across the river to Florence. After crossing O'Neal bridge, the first highway exit will be for AL 20 west. Take this exit, loop under US 43, and turn left to access AL 20. Follow AL 20 west a few miles, and the entrance to the waste treatment facility will be on the left, immediately after you cross Cypress Creek bridge. Follow the entrance road into the facility (Note: if gate is open, the facility is open for public access). After passing the treatment buildings and equipment, stop at the last building and check in the office to let them know you will be watching ducks on the waste treatment ponds. ALL visitors must check into the office. Expect a variety of ducks, primarily Shovelers, Bufflehead, Scaup, and Ring-necked Ducks. A female Long-tailed Duck has wintered here each of the past two years.

Thanks for the Stories

THE YELLOWHAMMER MUST BE PRINTED IN FOUR-PAGE increments. Thus we are always in need of your articles, of virtually any size, to make the pages come out right. If you have an article, story, or amusing incident about your birding adventures, trips, yard sightings, or just short vignettes that were interesting, different, or entertaining, 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.

A O S WINTER MEETING, JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, JANUARY 25 - 27, 2019

Meet the Speaker: Conor McGowan

CONOR MCGOWAN, PhD, is the acting unit leader of the U.S. Geological Survey Alabama Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. He is a research wildlife biologist whose work primarily focuses on decision support science in endangered species conservation.

Shorebird Conservation

By CONOR MCGOWAN, PhD



HE ANTICIPATION IS PALPABLE, AT FIRST. SOMETIMES, after hours of waiting for the perfect conditions, the anticipation turns to boredom, but not on this day. Within minutes of settling in out of sight behind the dunes the radio crackles with the message "There are about 200 knots and 300 turnstones

in the catching area; we are going to fire any moment; be ready." Then moments later, an explosion rings out, and we all run to the cannon net with boxes and bags ready to start extracting shorebirds before they overheat or get wet. There's always shouting and running and apparent chaos, but almost always all the birds are extracted from the nets without injury and safely ferried off to the shade, but the clock is still running; we have four hours from the minute the net fires to get the birds banded, processed and released. No breathers for these scientists, there's three hours of data collection to complete under the hot sun on the beaches of Delaware Bay.

A banded male Red Knot in breeding plumage. Banding enables researchers to track the size and health of migratory shorebird populations. (Greg Breese/USFWS)





Red Knots feeding on Horseshoe Crab eggs in Delaware Bay. Human harvesting of the crabs has had a negative effect on shorebird populations. (Greg Breese/USFWS)

I've been working in the Delaware Bay, studying the stop-over ecology of migratory shorebirds for over ten years, helping to trap birds in scenes like the one described above, to try and understand the pressures and limitations on shorebird populations during their annual cycles. Approximately 80% of shorebird species worldwide have exhibited some level of decline over the last three decades and migratory species have been especially prone to declines. These species are very difficult to study and understand their ecology because of their complex annual cycles. The Red Knots that I study, for example, spend the months of November through March in South America, as far south as Tierra del Fuego, and breed in Arctic Canada from June to September. They spend the intervening months on epic migrations, moving between the wintering sites and breeding sites, stopping for weeks at a time here and there (e.g. Delaware Bay) along the journey. We trap them to put bands on their legs so that we can estimate population parameters like abundance or survival and track patterns in those metrics over time. We also weigh the birds and measure their body size to look at changes in body condition and health over time.

The central question of much of the ongoing research on shorebird populations, worldwide, is: what factors are

causing shorebird declines, and what can we do to stop them. Some studies for some species point to problems during the wintering period, issues like hunting, disturbance, or large scale climate factors like El Nino. Other studies in other locations point to problems in the Arctic breeding grounds, such as climate change cause seasonal mismatch, or changes in predator populations. Still other studies are finding problems during migration like loss of habitat in China's Yellow Sea or Horseshoe Crab harvesting in Delaware Bay. One thing is certain: these animals have marvelously complex annual cycles with epic migration journeys, and understanding their annual complexities and challenges is key to their conservation.

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Ann McLaurin

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In honor of Sue Moske by Bala Chennupati
 In honor of Richard & Linda Reynolds by Bala Chennupati

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Telephone: (205) 879-1935 • Email: joanwsdixon@gmail.com

Please make checks payable to AOS. Checks must be received by January 15, 2019

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YOU CAN ALSO REGISTER ONLINE AT WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG

Registration @ \$25 per person	\$
Number of people for Wheeler NWR Field Trip	
Banquet Buffet @ \$25 per person	\$
2019 DUES	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

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