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

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JARED WOLFE, PhD
# ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 1325, DAUPHIN ISLAND, AL 36528-1325

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To occur to me recently that I am almost halfway through my term as your president. As I said in my first Harry’s Corner, there are a lot of things I didn’t know about this job, and I am still finding out new things every day. I want to thank all of you who have stepped up and volunteered your time, support and advice.

In the summer Yellowhammer, I encouraged everyone to get out and do some summer birding. I decided to take my own advice and found out that summer birding, as I expected, was indeed hot! It was also very rewarding. My summer birding expeditions were confined mostly to the Wheeler and Wilson Dams, the ponds in Colbert County (Leighton, Gantt, and Marthaler), and the Alabama A&M farm, properly known as the Winfred Thomas Agricultural Research Station (Site 27 NABT). Both dams provided looks at herons, egrets, White Pelicans and gulls. The county ponds were very productive at least through the middle of July when they had plenty of water. Black-necked Stilts were nesting at Marthaler. I saw the adults but was not fortunate enough to see the young one. Imagine my excitement when I drove by Marthaler in June looking for the Stilts and saw four juvenile Roseate Spoonbills. Before it dried up, the seasonal pond known locally as Gantt Pond held more white birds than I think I have ever seen in one place before. There were also Little Blue Herons, Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, and juvenile White Ibis. This is not an inclusive list, but you get the idea. The Leighton Pond is the last to dry up and most of the birds from the other ponds seem to end up there. The four Roseate Spoonbills called this place home until close to the end of July. The A&M farm with its 900 or so acres of grassland provided opportunities in the form of nesting Scissor-tail Flycatchers, Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Grasshopper Sparrows, Dickcissels, Northern Bobwhite quail, American Kestrels and many more. Most birding at this location was done from the car, which provided a cool blind for observation of courting, feeding and fledging. It was especially fun to watch the three juvenile kestrels chase each other across the fields. I learned that summer birding is more than just a time to clean binoculars and dream about future trips in the fall. It is a time to get off the couch and get out there. In the future, I know I will.

In a previous note, I encouraged the use of ALBirds as the way to communicate bird sightings in Alabama in addition to other methods such as eBird. I was happy to see that a few more people were putting notifications on ALBirds. Hopefully usage will increase as more birders are out this fall. I have to confess that my experience with this wasn’t the best the day I saw the four Roseate Spoonbills at Marthaler. I tried to post on ALBirds but found out that I didn’t have the subscription on my iPhone. Turns out that I couldn’t get the eBird app to work right either. So I resorted to calling someone and asking them to post for me. I should have just relaxed and enjoyed the birds.

AOS is fortunate to have members with talents across a wide spectrum. Besides bird experts, we have tree, plant, bug, and just about any kind of expert you can think of. We also have talented photographers. AOS has sponsored a bird photography contest for the last two years to highlight the work of these people as well as bring new birders to the organization through photography. While the contest generated interest, it never fulfilled the goal of bringing in new members. In light of that and the resource requirements needed to support the contest, the Third Annual AOS Photography Contest has been cancelled. The public relations committee has an idea to continue to highlight our talented bird photographers. Look for details soon on Facebook and the AOS website. By the time you read this it might already be in place. Also, I plan to continue the Friday night members’ slideshows at meetings. I am really looking forward to the fall meeting, and I hope you are as well. Hopefully the birds and the weather will cooperate. We will be meeting in the Shelby Center at Sea Lab. The banquet speaker will be Dr. Jared Wolfe. He is an author and expert birder. Dr. Wolfe spent time over the last few years working on bird conservation in Equatorial Guinea. You can read more about him in this Yellowhammer. We are planning field trips to cover the island hot spots such as the Shell Mounds, airport, and Audubon Sanctuary, etc. These hotspot trips typically focus on neo-tropical migrants.
although there are frequently interesting wading birds at the airport. A trip to the Pelican Bay Peninsula is a great way to see and learn about a variety of plovers and sandpipers in addition to wading birds such as Reddish Egrets. There could be surprises on any of the trips. In the event that there is a field trip scheduled to the Blakely Ponds and you plan on attending, please fill out and fax the visit permission form ahead of time. The form is good for the calendar year so if you did one for the spring meeting you should be good. Just a side note: according to the Dauphin Island calendar, the Art Trail will be taking place on Saturday during our meeting. This event brings in a lot of people and traffic to the island. Many of the artist’s booths will be set up along Bienville so please be very careful when dashing off to find that rare bird. I always seem to miss them by five minutes anyway. I have quite a list of birds that I have missed by five minutes.

We are currently making plans for the Winter 2019 meeting. It will be held at Joe Wheeler State Park near Rogersville, Alabama, on January 25–27, 2019. Potential field trips include visits to the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge, and a pontoon boat trip on Wilson Lake.

Dues are due in January and are good for the calendar year. According to my very unscientific survey, it seems like we have about 100 people attending the spring meetings, maybe a few less than that in the fall, and around 60-75 for the winter meetings. The point here is that it is easy to forget to pay dues if you don’t attend the meetings. By paying dues on time in January, you can help us avoid the expense associated with sending out renewal notices.

Good birding and I hope to see you in October at the fall meeting on Dauphin Island.

**Elizabeth Motherwell Retires From UA Press**

Elizabeth Motherwell was recently honored for her significant contribution to the State of Alabama through her work at the University of Alabama Press as natural history editor from 2009 to 2018. At a retirement party hosted by the Press on August 17, a commendation and gift were presented on behalf of the Advisory Panel of the Gosse Nature Guide Series, the Alabama Fern Society, the Alabama Ornithological Society, the Alabama Wildflower Society, the Blanche Dean Chapter of the Alabama Wildflower Society, the Birmingham Herpetological Society, and the Birmingham Audubon Society.

During her time as natural history editor, Beth was responsible for creating the Gosse Nature Guides, a series of natural history guide books devoted to Alabama plants and animals, and named in honor of the early English naturalist Philip Henry Gosse, who visited Alabama in 1838, and wrote about and illustrated his observations of Alabama’s flora and fauna. Beth is also responsible for the publication of many other books about natural history.

Because of Alabama’s climate, its abundant water resources, its geologic diversity, and its rich evolutionary past, Alabama ranks first in biodiversity east of the Mississippi River and fifth in the entire United States. Thanks to Beth, we have many valuable reference books to help us understand and appreciate the exceptional biodiversity of our state.

—Anne G. Miller

**New Members**

Peter Carter
George & Katherine Clemo
Erfan Chowdhury
Channing and Griffin Hornsby
Brandon Jenkins
Andrew Lydeard
Cliff & Cindy Martin
Larry Pirkle
Ruston Sanders
James Sims
William Tyndall
Tom White

**New Life Members**

Mimi Johnson
Lyl Parker
**Death of a Goldfinch**

**During the winter, American Goldfinches are rather (olive) drab little birds with smart black wings. But by March, the males begin to molt into their summer splendor, when the olive drab is replaced with a gorgeous lemon yellow. A spiffy little black cap will adorn their heads. By Easter they will rival any Easter egg around. Put a few American Goldfinches and a few Indigo Buntings in your yard, and you can forget the colored eggs.**

Unfortunately, most American Goldfinches breed north of where I live in central Alabama, all the way up into Canada, and down to north Alabama. There are a few records of American Goldfinches breeding around here, but the southern line seems to be about Montgomery. Pat and I kept hoping that if we fed them enough and made them feel at home, at least one pair would forego the trip and stay. Finally, we have had breeding pairs two years.

A few Februarys ago I noticed an American Goldfinch in obvious distress. She was stumbling drunkenly in the grass on the lawn. As I watched, she righted herself with some difficulty, and with more than a little dignity, she swiftly tucked her head beneath her left wing. There she stayed.

I had heard of a paralysis induced by the bite of a tick that was killing goldfinches. The report also said that if the tick is removed, the paralysis often reverses itself within a couple of hours and the birds often recover. Hoping to affect such a miracle cure in this instance, I immediately went out, and, without the slightest difficulty, picked up the bird. She weighed nothing—no more than a sheet of paper. The usual place for these ticks is the back of the neck, which is the only place where the little goldfinch can’t reach. There was no tick. When I first perceived how light she was, literally nothing but a tiny bundle of feathers, I knew it was too late. She was clearly dying.

I wrapped all but her head in a dark cloth to absorb as much warmth as possible, placed her in the warmest spot on the patio, and left her alone.

A little while later, I noticed that she had crept out of the protection of the rags and lay with wings outspread, collapsed, her head resting on the floor. I first took her to be dead, but closer examination revealed the slightest tremor of a panting breath. As it was a cool morning, I decided—rightly or wrongly, I do not know—to hold her gently and provide her with as much warmth as possible. I held her thus for several minutes as her breathing became shallower and her eyes began to close.

She died in my hands.

I have not seen much death in my life, but the moment never ceases to amaze me. One moment there is life, and the next there is not.

I have witnessed the miracle of birth and the miracle of death, and God was present at both. Christ said that not even a sparrow falls but that the Father knows about it. Every living creature faces death, but never alone. The Father knows about it, and if He knows, He cares. God and I shared a special moment that day. There is one less American Goldfinch, but others will hatch soon to take her place. This wonderful cycle of life continues. Spring is about to conquer winter, and the march goes on. We are richer for it.
AOS Highlights Featured Photographer on Website

By KEN HARE

Starting in August, the Alabama Ornithological Society will feature a member and the member’s best bird photos on its website. Every four to eight weeks, AOS will feature a new member’s photographs as the scrolling photos at the top of the AOS website’s home page, as well as a short story about the featured member elsewhere on the page (www.aosbirds.org).

With just a little arm twisting, AOS President Harry Dean agreed to be the guinea pig as the first “Featured Photographer.” His photographs went live on the page in mid-August. The goal is to have a new featured photographer every four to eight weeks.

The project is designed to foster an interest in nature photography and in birding in general, as well as to generate traffic for the website and help build a catalog of good bird photos for the website and for other AOS promotional projects.

Featured photographers must agree to allow photographs to be used on the AOS website and Facebook pages and in promotional materials. Photos must have been taken in Alabama or on an AOS field trip out of state, such as the 2018 winter meeting field trips in Florida. Photos do not have to be from the past year.

If you would like to be considered as a future “Featured Photographer” on the AOS website, email Ken Hare at kmhare46@knology.net for further details.

If you know of bird photographers who are not AOS members who might like to be considered, please urge them to join the society so that they can be considered.

Electronic Yellowhammer?

It costs well over a dollar and a half to print and mail The Yellowhammer. We are delivering, on a totally voluntary basis, The Yellowhammer via the Internet. If you would like to receive your Yellowhammer, in color, electronically, as a PDF file, please email the editor at BobReed1987@gmail.com.

Upcoming Meetings

FALL MEETING—October 12-14, 2018
Dauphin Island, Alabama

WINTER MEETING—January 25-27, 2019
Joe Wheeler State Park, Rogersville

SPRING MEETING—April 19-21, 2019
Dauphin Island, Alabama
AOS Fall Meeting Schedule

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2018
7:30 a.m.  Field Trip—Historic Fort Morgan with Andrew Haffenden
           See field trip descriptions p. 8 for details.
           Please email Andrew at andrew@natsp.com if you plan to attend so any last minute
           changes can be sent to you.

5:00 p.m.  Registration, Social Hour
           Where: Shelby Center

6:00 p.m.  Potluck Supper—Please bring a dish to share! Bring your favorite appetizer for the
           social hour, a main course dish for supper, a dessert, or all of the above!

6:45 p.m.  Announcements

7:00 p.m.  Ken Wills on Exploring Wild Alabama

7:30 p.m.  Members Photography Slide Show

8:30 p.m.  Discussion of Weekend Field Trips

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2018
7:00 a.m.  Field Trip 1: Exploring Dauphin Island
           with Dr. Jared Wolfe
           Field Trip 2: Birds of Pelican Bay Peninsula
           with Andrew Haffenden
           See field trip descriptions p. 8 for details.

11:30 a.m. Potluck Lunch at the home of Jennie Stowers

3:00 p.m.  Board Meeting Shelby Center

5:00 p.m.  Registration

5:30 p.m.  BANQUET AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER
           Where: Shelby Center

5:30 p.m.  Social Hour (donations benefit the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary)

6:30 p.m.  Banquet

7:15 p.m.  Announcements

7:30 p.m.  Keynote Speaker: Dr. Jared Wolfe—
           Exploration and conservation in the country
           least known to science: an introduction to
           Equatorial Guinea

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2018
7:00 a.m.  Field Trip—Blakeley Island Mud Lakes
           with Larry Gardella
           Meeting Place: Cadillac Square
           See field trip descriptions p. 8 for details.

12:00 p.m. Compilation at the Goat Trees. (Includes
           all bird sightings in Mobile and Baldwin
           Counties from noon, Friday, October 12,
           2018, to noon Sunday, October 14, 2018)

Accommodations on Dauphin Island are limited.
Be sure to make reservations early for AOS Meetings.

Websites:
www.gulfinfo.com
www.dauphinisland.chamber.com

Motels:
Gulf Breeze Motel: 251-861-7344, 1-800-286-0296

Bed and Breakfast:
Dauphin Island Harbor House: 251-861-2119
Air BnB has lots of rentals! www.airbnb.com

Rentals:
Boardwalk Realty, Inc.: 877-861-3992
Dauphin Island Real Estate: 888-707-6444
Tyson Real Estate: 800-865-8312
ACP Real Estate, Inc.: 866-861-3311

Camping:
Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board: 251-861-2742
(fully equipped for both camper and tent camping)
AOS 2018 Fall Meeting Field Trips

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2018
Historic Fort Morgan
Trip Leader: Andrew Haffenden
Departure Time: 7:30 a.m.
Meeting Place: Cadillac Square

We’ll take the 8 a.m. ferry across the mouth of Mobile Bay to historic Fort Morgan, a 30-minute trip. We use the ride as a mini-pelagic, as gannets and other seabirds can often be seen on the way across. Fort Morgan is the #1 rarity site in Alabama, and we’re hoping for something unusual to pop up. Even without that, the woodland birding is usually good in migration, and if there’s been rain the fields can attract a variety of grasspipers and other shorebirds. Peregrine Falcons, Merlins, and Bald Eagles are usually seen here. We’ll check the lagoon on the gulf side of the fort for waders, ducks and bitterns and the low scrub for sparrows and other seed-eaters. There’ll also be time for looking at the famous “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead” fort. Lunch will be at Tacky Jack’s, a seafood restaurant overlooking Mobile Bay, the return to the island on the 2 p.m. ferry, unless the birding is so good we stay longer in the fort precinct. For those who don’t want to have lunch, there is a 12:30 p.m. ferry back. Non-lunchers can also stay with the group; just getting some water or other drink is okay by the restaurant. **Note:** There is a fee for the ferry crossing and entry to the fort.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2018
Exploring Dauphin Island with Dr. Jared Wolfe
Trip Leader: TBA
Departure Time: 7:00 a.m.
Meeting Place: Cadillac Square

We’ll bird the varied habitats of Dauphin Island with our keynote speaker Dr. Jared Wolfe, starting at the airport for rails and sparrows, then to the Shell Mounds for warblers, vireos, tanagers and any other neotropical migrants we can find. In addition to the Shell Mounds we’ll check out the Audubon Sanctuary and other island hotspots, aided by the cellphone network of sightings by other birders on the island. We’ll finish in time for the potluck lunch at Jennie Stowers’ house, overlooking Bayou Heron and Graveline Bay.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2018
Birds of Pelican Island
Trip Leader: Andrew Haffenden
Departure: 7:00 a.m.
Meeting Place: Cadillac Square

Join DI resident Andrew Haffenden to get to know the birds of Alabama’s richest beach habitat, Pelican Island (formerly an island, now a peninsula), near the eastern end of Dauphin Island. With an eBird count currently standing at 185 species, Pelican Island is exceptional for a strip of beach and dune 100-150 yards wide and just over 1.5 miles long. We’ll take the opportunity to turn the walk into an easy mini-workshop, quickly learning to separate the small plovers from the small sandpipers and from each other, separating often confusing species such as Caspian and Royal Terns, and learning many ID points rarely seen in the guide books. It’s an easy walk on flat sand, and our distance traveled depends on how close the birds are to the pier. Participants can return to their cars at any time. There’ll be several spotting scopes for general use, which can quickly ramp up your shorebird ID skills. As with the general Dauphin Island outing, we’ll back in time for the potluck lunch.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2018
Field Trip to Blakeley Island Mud Lakes
Trip Leader: Larry Gardella
Departure Time: 7:00 a.m.
Meeting Place: Cadillac Square

The Blakeley Island Mud Lakes are a complex of disposal ponds that attract large numbers of shorebirds and waterfowl. We’ll carpool to the site and walk the dirt road up the dike to view rows of ponds of varying depths. Expect to see American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Mottled Ducks, a variety of sandpipers and a variety of other shorebirds, as well as Gull-billed Terns, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, and raptors such as Peregrine Falcons, Merlins and Northern Harriers. Mud Lakes has often turned up rarities, so the birding is always interesting. We’ll return to Dauphin Island in time for compilation at noon.

**Note:** A permit form must be lodged with the State Docks Authority prior to your arrival. Click here: [http://www.aos-birds.org/alabama-birding/blakeley-island/](http://www.aos-birds.org/alabama-birding/blakeley-island/) to register in advance. Registration is valid for the rest of the current year.
Dr. Jared Wolfe is a professor at Michigan Technological University and wildlife ecologist at the USDA Forest Service with an interest in the natural history and demographics of tropical birds. Jared has published over forty peer-reviewed articles, one book, and co-founded Biodiversity Initiative, a nonprofit focused on the conservation and study of birds and mammals in Central Africa.

Exploration and Conservation in the Country Least Known to Science: An Introduction to Equatorial Guinea

By Jared Wolfe, PhD

“THAT IS A NEW COUNTRY RECORD” REMARKED JACOB COOPER, my colleague and fellow ornithologist working in Africa. “It’s an Ethiopian swallow. They have been expanding their range west. This is the fifth country record we’ve documented for Equatorial Guinea in 2016." New bird records for entire countries are exceedingly rare. How is it possible we recorded five new species in Equatorial Guinea within a single year?

Equatorial Guinea is a well-known biodiversity hotspot dominated by rich lowland Congolese forest hosting forest elephants, common chimpanzees, and western lowland gorillas. Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish speaking country in Africa, and until the recent discovery of massive oil reserves within their political boundaries, it was one of the poorest. The vast amount of oil wealth fueled unprecedented development, including the creation of a new capital city carved out of virgin rain forest. Political instability coupled with crushing poverty has dissuaded scientists and conservationists from working in the country for decades. However, the recent and dizzying pace of construction has presented a new and pressing conservation challenge: the extinction of undescribed birds and mammals before their discovery. In 2014, my colleagues (Luke Powell, Jacob Cooper, and Kristin Brzeski) and I formed Biodiversity Initiative (www.biodiversityinitiative.org), a group of wildlife biologists dedicated to identifying and protecting the most biologically sensitive areas in the country. To meet our objectives, we survey wildlife in biologically-rich areas at risk of development, and work with the Equatoguinean government towards the protection of these areas by training them in conservation principles as well as the survey techniques necessary to measure biodiversity. We also collaborate with government officials to petition the creation and expansion of protected areas to buffer vulnerable habitats from exploitation.

In addition to surveys, we engage in exploration. These trips include wildlife surveys in remote and unforgiving locations such as the Caldera de Luba, a vast stretch of pristine forest within the crater of an extinct volcano. The multi-day hike into Caldera de Luba makes it difficult for hunters to kill and carry bushmeat to market before it spoils, making the area one of the least disturbed forests in Africa. In 2016 we completed our first expedition of the caldera. Upon de-
scending the steep igneous lip of the dormant volcano, I was struck by the sheer number and density of primates. Every few minutes troops of black colobus monkeys and critically-endangered red colobus monkeys scampered at the sound of approaching footsteps. The bellowing calls of drill monkeys, nearly hunted to extinction outside the caldera, carried across human-less valleys on the afternoon breeze. Given the remote nature of the area, primatologists believe the Caldera de Luba hosts the densest number of primates in all of Africa. In addition to primates, we were interested in assessing the status of one of the most unique, rare, and interesting birds in Africa: the Grey-necked Picathartes. These birds are the size of a crow, with a splendid shot of red and black bordering powder-blue skin through the face. They wander forest floors with their long and gangly legs following army ants and eating insects. They raise their young in swallow-like nests under large boulders, free from the grasp of all but the most daring primates, civets, and mongoose intent on eating their young. Picathartes are difficult to see outside nest colonies (none have been found within the unforgiving rocky cliffs of the caldera) making their populations difficult to monitor. To assess their numbers, we established transects of camera traps throughout the caldera and left camera traps in the caldera for three months. Our results indicated the birds, like their primate counterparts, are quite numerous. These expeditions are important because they provide glimpses of an unspoiled fauna that has been lost to hunters, development, and logging outside the protection of a remote volcano.

Through science, collaboration and capacity building, we aim to protect pristine wildlife communities, and with time, help establish an era of restoration leading to the proliferation of intact and accessible ecosystems outside the protections of remote wilderness. I want to thank the Alabama Ornithological Society for their invitation to speak at their fall meeting, and I look forward to sharing more about the culture, politics, and birds of the country least known to science.

**Editor’s Note:** Interested in learning more about Biodiversity Initiative’s expedition to Caldera de Luba? Check out their cover story in *Audubon Magazine* documenting their trip: [www.audubon.org/magazine/summer-2016/land-lost-birds-searching-life-forests-bioko](http://www.audubon.org/magazine/summer-2016/land-lost-birds-searching-life-forests-bioko).
AOS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL
Your Membership Dues Support the Work of the Alabama Ornithological Society

Please check membership category: _____ New Member _____ Renewing Member

Please check membership category: ____ Student $10 _____ Individual $25 ____ Family $40* ____ Sustaining $50
_____ Life (individual) $350 _____ Life (family*) $550 *Number of family members_________________________

Communicating with our members online saves the earth’s resources, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and also saves much-needed funds for AOS. Your digital subscription to The Yellowhammer and Alabama Birdlife will automatically be sent to the email address listed below. To receive print copies of AOS publications instead, please ______ check here. Mail your completed form and check to:

Joan Dixon, 1059 Palmetto Street, Mobile, AL 36604

Name(s)________________________________________________________________________________________________
Street Address________________________________________________________________________________________
City_________________________________________________________State______________ZIP__________________
Email address______________________________________________________Phone_________________________

YOU CAN ALSO JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP ONLINE AT WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG

AOS FALL MEETING 2018 REGISTRATION FORM
Complete and return to:
Joan Dixon, 1059 Palmetto Street, Mobile, AL 36604
Telephone: (205) 879-1935 • Email:joanwsdixon@gmail.com

Please make checks payable to AOS. Checks must be received by October 2, 2018

Name(s)_____________________________________________________________________________
Address________________________________________________________________________________
City________________________________________________ State____________ Zip_______________
Email Address____________________________________________ Phone________________________

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

YOU CAN ALSO REGISTER ONLINE AT WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG

| Registration @ $25 per person | $ |
| Do you plan to go on the Friday Field Trip? (see p.10) | (No Charge) |
| Banquet Buffet @ $25 per person | $ |
| (circle year you are paying) AOS 2018/2019 DUES | $ |
| DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution | $ |
| TOTAL ENCLOSED | $ |