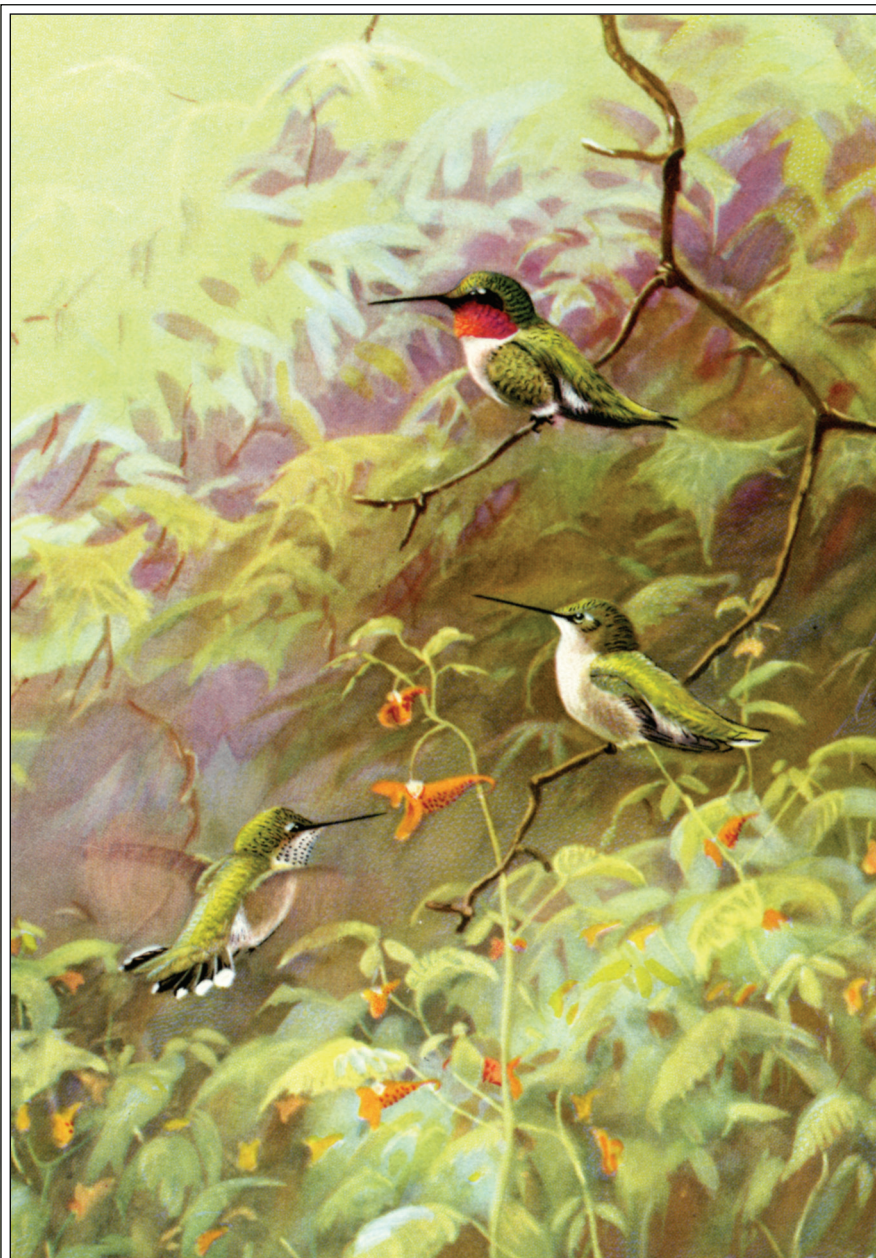


THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 34, NO. 3 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY FALL 2014

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

FOUNDED 1952



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HI FOLKS. HOPE EVERYONE IS doing well. Looks like we maybe headed for another cold winter up here in northern Alabama; the polar express has emphatically made its presence known a couple of times already. I just spent a frigid afternoon up on Monte Sano, along the Cold Springs trail near the park, with my Dendrology students. It was a beautiful day, and a gorgeous place to study trees, but we were ready to get out of there and head back to school after the quiz. Rufina and I also got a chance to visit southern California earlier this month for a meeting in Long Beach and to visit friends. Rufina attended graduate school at UC-Riverside; it was her first home in the US, and she made lots of friends there. We also honeymooned on nearby Catalina Island and got a chance to visit again while we were there (silver wedding anniversary coming up in January).

Well, as always, I want to express my appreciation to those of you who attended the most recent AOS fall meeting. It was not the most memorable meeting with respect to the birds, but a wonderful experience nonetheless, especially for Rufina and myself, being able to visit and bird with those of you we don't get to see often. Thanks again, Maureen Shaffer and Anne Miller, for your efforts toward making the meeting run smoothly and taking on all of the chores and responsibilities associated with local arrangements. As always, we want to thank the Stowers for providing AOS members another fantastic lunch, not to mention the chance to socialize and relate stories of the day's birding. Thanks much to Ann McLaurin and Lynne Fitzgerald for hosting our compilation on their property, just across the street from the famous Goat Tree. Also want to relay thanks to our trip leaders, which included Andrew Haffenden, Harry Dean, Anne Miller, Maureen Shaffer, John Trent and Greg Miller, for leading field trips and providing their expertise. As always, thanks to all who assisted in set-up and restoration of the Shelby Center. Thanks also to Rufina Ward for her efficient handling of registration duties and other responsibilities, as Treasurer, with some much appreciated help from Berta Pylant. As usual, Wilton Caterers did a nice job with our banquet meal. Last but not least, we



want to thank DISL for their hospitality in making the Shelby Center available for the meeting.

I want to thank our banquet speaker, Greg Miller, for joining us during our meeting. Greg, it was truly a pleasure getting to know you; we enjoyed your heartfelt presentation, getting to bird with you, and having the opportunity to gain from your formidable expertise, especially through your willingness to lead one of our trips. Thanks again, David and Berta, for securing a nice place to stay for the meeting on the island and your hospitality in inviting Rufina, me and Greg to stay with you; we really enjoyed ourselves.

The AOS winter meeting will be held January 23-25, 2015 at Joe Wheeler State Park Lodge near Rogersville in northwestern Alabama (additional details in this *Yellowhammer*). Our speaker will be Dwight Cooley, who will also lead a field trip/workshop to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, where he is the Refuge Manager. We are finalizing field trips as I write this message, but as of now we are planning to offer at least three additional trips, including one to the park/Wilson and Wheeler dams/Town Creek marsh, Waterloo/Key Cave NWR and a pelagic trip on Wheeler Reservoir, as was done last time we had our meeting here in 2013. We'll also have a student presenting during the Friday mixer/slide show, one of the recent recipients of a Holliman award.

As some of you know, I retired from Alabama A&M University (AAMU) early this fall. However, I remain connected to the forestry program I once directed, through my teaching and continued involvement in some of its program initiatives. One of these, which I have mentioned before, involves our partnership with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES), Auburn University, the Student Conservation Association and The Nature Conservancy, to develop an outdoor classroom facility focusing on ecologically sustainable agricultural and natural resource management practices. The Graham Farm and Nature Center (GFNC) was officially dedicated last May and continues to move forward. We recently had a program planning meeting during which I was asked to chair a subcommittee focused on the development of educational programs oriented toward ecology,

a particular passion of the former landowners. We hope to get some activities on the ground this coming spring, which will involve local youth through such groups as 4-H, as well as other faculty and staff, particularly those associated with AAMU and local schools. One important ongoing task that provides a plethora of educational opportunities is the biological/ecological inventory of the property that is currently moving forward. To this point AAMU students, faculty and staff have collected a lot of information on the local flora and fauna occupying GFNC and nearby areas. The North Alabama Birdwatching Society and Birmingham Audubon Society have both made trips to the property the past couple of years, and I have led a group of botanists/ecologists there to continue the plant inventory. We continue to look for volunteers who are willing to help with the inventory and hope to involve young folks and others in some of this work as an educational activity, not to mention offering more formalized educational activities for larger groups. Regarding birds, there is interest in establishing a banding station on the property to study bird migration patterns, and I definitely want to do some breeding bird point counts out there in the near future. Contact me or William Stone (forestry program coordinator and wildlife biologist, 256-372-4248, william.stone@aamu.edu) if you are interested in participating in some way. Most any floral or faunal group is in need of inventory work.

As I close this message I want to mention Bob Sargent; most or all of you are aware of Bob's passing late last summer. Rufina and I attended the memorial service for Bob last October in Trussville, which was a very moving, yet positive and forward-thinking event, very much in the spirit of Bob and Martha. Rufina and I did not know the Sargents that well. I have seen Bob and Martha regularly for a good many years during the Wheeler NWR Christmas Count, but typically only had time for a short visit. They usually picked up a few memorable species; in particular I remember their group finding LeConte's Sparrow and Brewer's Blackbird on a pretty regular basis. I could certainly tell they were special people; generous lovers of life would describe them well. Otherwise, our most memorable encounter with them was when Rufina and I visited their banding station at Fort Morgan 2-3 years ago, during an AOS meeting. We visited at a particularly opportune time; as I recall, Bob had in hand what appeared to be a MacGillivray's Warbler, a western species seldom en-

countered this far east. We did not stay long, but Bob's character, described so vividly during the memorial, really shined through. The gentleness, fascination and genuine love for what he was doing, not just the birds, but the interaction with those working with him and those visiting were openly apparent. I don't remember whether any children were there at the time, but I can imagine how good he must have been with them. Our sincere condolences to Martha and the rest of Bob's family. But, oh my, what a life to be celebrated!!

Membership Renewal

THIS WINTER *YELLOWHAMMER* COMES OUT NEAR THE END OF 2014 and talks about our upcoming winter meeting in January 2015. This transition affects all members who have not paid into the future. The AOS membership year ends December 31, so it is time for membership renewals.

I have recently been in touch with people whose membership had expired before last year, and I will be calling others over the next month or so. So far, most of the people were unaware that they had failed to renew. If you check the date on your *Yellowhammer* label, you can see when you last paid.

If you are going to the winter meeting, you can pay for your renewal along with your registration. If you can't join us in January, please go to www.aosbirds.org/membership.php to get an application. Send your check, made payable to AOS, to our treasurer:

Dr. Rufina Ward
1689 Longleaf Drive,
Huntsville, AL 35806

Please indicate that you are renewing. We very much want to keep you as members, so please renew.

—Larry Gardella

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Spring 2015	February 10, 2015
Summer 2015	May 30, 2015
Fall 2015	August 10, 2015

IN MEMORIAM

A Tribute to Bob Sargent



ALABAMA BIRDS LOST A GREAT friend with the passing of Bob Sargent on September 7, 2014, at the age of 77. His accom-

plishments were many. He was a master bander, certified by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. He was past president of the Alabama Ornithological Society. He and his wife, Martha Gail, founded the Hummer/Bird Study Group. He also authored a book on Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, and literally rewrote the conventional wisdom that there were no wintering hummingbirds in the southeast and that the only hummer in Alabama was the Ruby-throat. Following are tributes from a few of those whose life he touched.

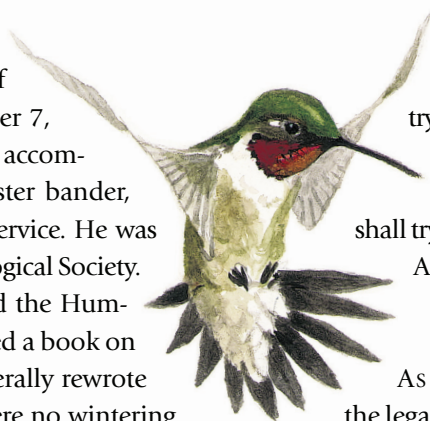
OTHERS MAY STAND WHERE BOB SARGENT STOOD AND POUR OUT their hearts to and for the birds, but none will ever replace Bob. He was a giant, a man whose big hands held tiny feathered creatures like they were little angels. He would spot a child or a new birder among the group and invite them to share his joy in a tiny hummingbird, often gently placing the bird in a little hand, showing how to feel the heartbeat before releasing it to continue its journey across the Gulf.

Bob inspired children. He captured the heart of otherwise casual onlookers. Even accomplished birders learned from him. He died on September 7, 2014, a great loss for Martha and for all who benefited from his ability to educate and inspire.

—Celeste Hinds

WE ARE BLESSED INDEED IF ONCE IN A LIFETIME WE MEET A GENTLE giant like Bob Sargent. We are blessed beyond measure if we meet two like Martha Gail and Bob. They were the perfect couple.

Bob relished life more than anyone else I have ever known. He never lost his childlike enthusiasm for what was around the next bend, what bird would appear next, and what he could learn from that bend, bird, or person. He counted every moment on this planet as a gift from God, and he



was determined not to waste a second of it.

But Bob had a hard side to him. Don't ever try to harm birds, or those he loved. That was sure to get you corrected in a heartbeat.

I will miss Bob more than I can say, but I shall try to live life more fully because of his example. And, as he said in every email: Life is Good!

—Bob Reed

AS A GEORGIA BIRDER, I WANTED TO PAY TRIBUTE TO the legacy of Bob Sargent who had a positive impact on my kids during several visits to Fort Morgan a number of years back. Since that time, I always appreciated Bob's regular posts that, without fail, exuded a profound zest for life and passion for birds. I will miss his reports. His contributions to the public awareness of bird conservation issues was enormous. Our thoughts and prayers are with Martha during this difficult time.

—Ted Theus,
Columbus, Georgia

BOB WAS INDEED A MOST GENTLE, DEDICATED, CARING, AND intelligent person. He helped me greatly when I was going through the loss of my first wife of 39 years. I can't look at a hummingbird any more without thinking about this man who taught us so much through his banding work.

—Malcolm R. Braid, Ph.D.,
Professor Emeritus of Biology

IT'S HARD TO SAY GOODBYE TO BOB. HARD TO PUT MY THOUGHTS about him—what he meant to me, what he meant to conservation, what a hole he leaves in all our lives—into some sort of order and perspective.

I knew Bob first as a bander. I grew to see him as one of the most natural educators I've ever met, and came to count him as both a valued colleague and one of my dearest friends.

I'd never encountered an operation so generously open and welcoming to the public. And I'd rarely met anyone so

genuinely, warmly welcoming himself. Nor was it only Bob and Martha. It was the whole crew, the whole family—and I use that word very carefully and precisely—that they had assembled. They invited me to dinner in the old Fort bakery where they used to bunk in those days, where everyone was jammed cheek to jowl together. All I remember about that dinner was Martha's spaghetti, and the kind of all-enveloping sense of warmth and mutual affection that anyone would want to be part of.

Bob made a difference. The odd curves of life that brought him and Martha back together, and then nudged them into banding and research, were not only a gift to them personally, but a wider gift to anyone who cares about birds and their survival.

Part of that wider gift, to us and to birds, was the Fort Morgan banding project. I'd been banding birds a long time when I first came to Fort Morgan, and frankly, I'd never seen anything like it—a combination of research project and tent revival, where the mission and the message was birds. That's where I fell under Bob's spell, the way he could convey to anyone, from little kid to aging senior, the absolute miracle wrapped in feathers that was a migratory bird.

The joy on the faces of the people in whose hands he placed a bird, the incandescent delight when they opened them and watched that bird fly, was a dim reflection of the joy Bob himself radiated.

Of course, the other immense contribution Bob and Martha made to science was in training an international cadre of hummingbird banders, from Canada to South America. It's hard to overstate the importance of just this single aspect of his life. All over this hemisphere there are men and women who were tutored by Bob and Martha, who are peeling back the layers of mystery on this group of birds he loved so much. That alone would be a legacy to be proud of.

Bob trained me in 2001, the first hummer bander north of the Mason-Dixon line. He was working with poor clay, but when he was done I was as good as I could be. To this day, every time I have a hummer in my hands—and for sure, when it's some rare western vagrant—I hear his advice rattling around in my head.

I never doubted that Bob loved me, as I loved him. As he loved all of us. I learned many things from my friend, and it may be that the most important lessons had nothing to do with birds.

I learned you should say the things that matter, to the people who matter, when you can still look them in the eye to tell them. I learned you should say "I love you" often, and emphatically, and regardless of whether it makes that person squirm a little bit, because in the end the world's a better place because you did so.

But in the end, I learned that even that's not enough to stop the pain when the person you love is gone. Bob passed the day before I could get down here to say that to him one last time. So even though I'm not looking him in the eyes: I love you, Bob. And by God, we're all going to miss you.

—Scott Weidensaul

Marbut Bend Nature Trail

IF YOU GET TO THE AOS WINTER MEETING EARLY, PAY A VISIT TO the Marbut Bend Nature Trail, TVA's new walking trail along the Elk River in Limestone County, Alabama.

The trail is approximately 1.1 miles in length (loop trail) including a crushed gravel walking trail and an elevated boardwalk through a beaver pond. The property is managed by TVA through an agricultural agreement with a local farmer for hay production, but also includes areas of scrub/grassland that will be maintained with prescribed fire, and scrub/forest thickets and riparian forests along the Elk River and two embayments of Wheeler Reservoir. Habitat diversity at this site is good, and will be getting better.

From the Shoals: Travel east on US 72 to Rogersville. At the traffic light (AL 207), turn north and travel 9.3 miles, through Anderson, to AL 99. Turn right on AL 99 (south) and travel 9.5 miles to the site. *Note:* You will pass through the Salem community (West Limestone High School) just before you get to the site. After passing through Salem, AL 99 will go down a large hill and then make a sharp left curve (Marbut Curve). The site will be on the right after the curve.

From Athens/I-65: From I-65, exit 354 (US 31), travel south on US 31 1.1 miles to AL 99 (Elm Street). Turn right and travel 3.3 miles on AL 99. AL 99 will then turn to the right. Turn right (stay on AL 99), then travel another 9.1 miles to the site, on the left. *Note:* You will cross the Elk River on AL 99, 1.6 miles before you get to the site.

The coordinates are 34.910851, -87.100983. For information, contact Damien J. Simbeck at 256-386-2543.

DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, OCTOBER 10-12, 2014

Fall Meeting Report

By GREG HARBER



ACKCLUSTER. IT'S NOT A WORD I USE VERY OFTEN, but it describes the birding on Dauphin Island during the AOS Fall Weekend. I don't know for certain, but I suspect the 147 species reported at compilation represents a low water mark for a fall meeting on the island. Two comments I overheard at the compilation sum up the weekend well: "thank God for the mainland," and, "I walked through the Shell Mounds and never once raised my binoculars."

That being said, the weekend was an enjoyable one, with enough variety and interesting sightings to occupy one's time. Scattered among the usual suspects came reports of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks and Roseate Spoonbill, and the Northern Gannet likely indicated the impending changing of the seasons. The vireos were well represented, with Warbling and Philadelphia included in the mix. Warblers were notably lacking during the weekend, with only eight species reported at compilation. The irony is that the couple weeks prior to the meeting produced copious warbler sightings in the Birmingham area.

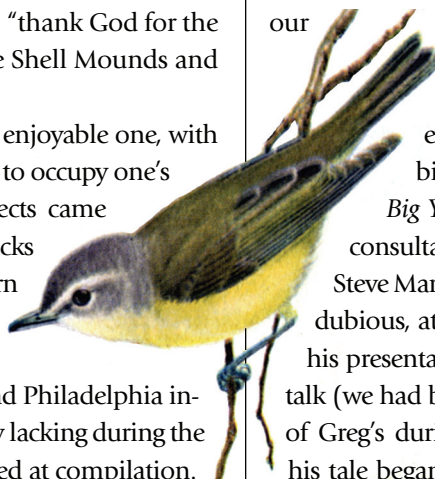
The Friday night meeting attendees were treated to several slide shows, including Alaska, Maine, and a study of sparrows, among others. The advent of digital photography has greatly increased the ability to share wonderful photos, and our members never fail to entertain us.

One of the fine traditions we have all come to enjoy is the Saturday luncheon at Sto and Jenny's house, and this year was no exception. Sto's seafood gumbo is so tasty, the company is the best, and the view from the deck is unbeatable! We all extend our thanks to Sto and Jenny for their hospitality.

Like many others in attendance, I made the ferry crossing to Fort Morgan to visit the Fort Morgan Banding Station for this, their final session. As many of you know, Bob Sargent died on September 7, 2014, and with his passing the difficult decision was made to disband the Hummer/Bird Study

Group that he and Martha co-founded. Take heart, however, members of the crew will continue their banding efforts, but on an individual basis. We are indebted to the Sargents and their crew for the years of research they have conducted and for their outreach to the community on behalf of birds and bird conservation. Rest in peace, Bob, for a job well done, and our condolences to Martha.

Greg Miller, the speaker at the Saturday night banquet, is most likely known by everyone as one of the three gentlemen whose birding exploits were profiled in the book *The Big Year*. Greg had the good fortune to serve as a consultant for the movie by the same name, starring Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson. I was a little dubious, at first, when Greg announced at the outset of his presentation that he had no slides to accompany his talk (we had been treated to some wonderful photographs of Greg's during dinner, playing as a slideshow). But, as his tale began to unfold, it was clear that he really didn't need photographs to illustrate his story and the audience followed along with each twist and turn of his Big Year adventure. For those of us who will likely never attempt a big year ourselves, it was a chance to live the experience vicariously. Greg was also kind enough to lead a field trip on the mainland.



Upcoming Meetings

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 23-25, 2015
Winter Meeting, Joe Wheeler State Park

THIRD FRIDAY—April 17-19, 2015
Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

SECOND FRIDAY—October 9-11, 2015
Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, OCTOBER 11, 2014

Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By PAT REED, *Secretary*



THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MET ON SATURDAY, October 11, 2014, at Dauphin Island, Alabama. President Ken Ward called the meeting to order after determining a quorum was present.

OFFICER REPORTS

SECRETARY: Pat Reed stated corrections had been made to the April 2014 minutes and moved they be approved. Upon second, the corrected minutes were approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Dr. Rufina Ward stated an updated financial report, as of December 2014, will be available in the spring *Yellowhammer*. She inquired how money from the April auction should be handled. Shirley Farrell stated this is Education Committee money, and as purchases are made by the committee, receipts will be submitted. Dr. Ward stated she had encountered a problem of not knowing exactly the duration on memberships; therefore, she is now making a notation of the date dues are paid. It was pointed out that membership is January-December yearly as stated in Larry Gardella's article in the latest *Yellowhammer*. Shirley Farrell asked if a record of life members is being kept, and Dr. Ward assured her it was. She requested members notify her of any change in address. Bob Reed inquired as to how the mailing list for *Alabama BirdLife* is handled. Dr. Ward stated she had not furnished a list but has paid for printing. After discussion President Ward stated he would make sure an updated mailing list is furnished to Tom Haggerty for the *Alabama BirdLife* mailings. Bob Reed thanked Dr. Ward for her work, stating the job of treasurer is the hardest one in AOS. Dr. Ward reported a donation of \$200 had been received from Gregg McClintock, Jr. of Dothan, who had requested it be used as AOS sees fit. It was the consensus of opinion that this money would best be used by DIBS. Move was made, seconded and approved to give the money to DIBS.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

MEMBERSHIP: Larry Gardella was unable to attend the meeting but furnished an email which stated he plans to contact non-payers between the fall and winter meetings to ask for their renewal. He also requested input on how to pursue membership from the HBSG and other organizations. He plans to contact Fred Bassett with a request he renew his AOS membership and an offer to print his yearly report on wintering western hummingbirds. Stan Hamilton volunteered to send reminder postcards to those who have not renewed. Anne Miller suggested self-addressed stamped envelopes would be better, or even better, a way to renew online. Shirley Farrell suggested one reason members may not be renewing is benefits, or lack thereof.

EDUCATION: Shirley Farrell stated Dee McKee approached her in April with a request for the Education Committee to participate in Art in the Park in June. As this was extremely short notice, the offer was declined for 2014 but accepted for June 2015. Mrs. Farrell stated her long-term goal is to make sure the committee has digital presentations, digitized slides and photographs for presentation by the committee as well as individual members who may present programs. She reported she also uses several games in her programs. Mrs. Farrell stated she was in need of brochures and volunteers, and a good pair of binoculars would be useful for her programs as well as having them available for AOS to loan during meeting weekends. She requested and received permission to advertise in *The Yellowhammer* for a donated pair of binoculars. Greg Harber reported the June 2014 Art in the Park was well attended. David Pylant suggested participation in this activity would give AOS more presence on the island.

MEETINGS: Anne Miller called attention to the bar contributions and after discussion moved that AOS cover the

out-of-pocket expense for the bar with all contributions going to DIBS with a limit of \$300 on the out-of-pocket expense for AOS per meeting. Further discussion was held including the question of liability and a report on the history of how John Porter started the bar operation. It was pointed out this money might be applied to speakers who will draw people in. Also discussed was how much cash should be kept on hand and the fact that dues and registration fees have not been raised in some time. After further discussion Ms. Miller's move was tabled for future consideration.

Ms. Miller then brought up the subject of speakers and marketing of AOS meetings, especially on the website. It was noted the AOS website is good, but rather static. It was mentioned that sponsors for speakers, such as Bass Pro Shop, might be worth looking into. Some of the things Ms. Miller suggested be placed on the website were a way to register for meetings and a list of field trips with the leader named. She also suggested checklists be handed out for field trips. Ms. Miller asked if the Meetings Committee should be doing the marketing and whether or not AOS has enough people to handle larger meetings. Shirley Farrell asked about the possibility of giving teachers a special membership rate. A suggestion was made to ask members for ideas, and what, if any, activities they would like to volunteer for, with the possibility of a door prize being given from these remarks.

DAUPHIN ISLAND BIRD SANCTUARY: Greg Harber stated the DIBS meeting will be held Sunday, October 12, 2014. One item on the agenda is the exploration of a proposed gift of 12 ½ acres next to salt marsh property owned by DIBS in Bayou La Batre. The person who owns the property does not want the property developed.

WEBSITE: No report; however, Ms. Miller's question as to whether the Meetings Committee should be handling the marketing was brought up. Bob Reed suggested that because of the good ideas Ms. Miller presented, when information is furnished him for *The Yellowhammer* it also be furnished to Ms. Miller in order for her to get with Kathy to give her the information exactly the way she wants it to appear on the website, noting this must be done in a timely fashion.

NEW BUSINESS

RECRUITMENT/MEMBERSHIP: President Ward stated this has been discussed; the pressing need is to contact those whose membership has lapsed or is about to lapse.

SORA: The University of New Mexico Searchable Ornithological Research Archive (SORA) is the world's first and largest open access ornithological publications archive. Eric Soehren has suggested AOS send *Alabama BirdLife* archives as well as current issues to be included in SORA. Eric has agreed to do the work and Tom Haggerty is aware of this. Upon being moved and seconded this was approved.

FORT MORGAN MANAGEMENT PLAN: President Ward, reporting for Greg Jackson, stated this is a very detailed plan for the present and future. Some thoughts on this were:

- Be diligent about the stable area;
- Promote the use of native plants;
- Prescribed burns as a preemptive measure such as stated in the plan for the Bird Sanctuary;
- Solicit banders to utilize the area such as the group from the University of Southern Mississippi; and
- Discourage destruction of natural habitat.

It was noted that communication with the new people at the fort is much better. (A copy of the Preliminary Natural Areas Management Plan is attached to the minutes.)

HUMMER/BIRD STUDY GROUP: A discussion was held as to whether or not AOS should approach this group about obtaining their membership list and other groups as well. It was noted the HBSG list is very widespread and would require a breakdown for AOS needs. After further discussion it was agreed to ask Bianca Allen, if she is comfortable doing so, to approach Martha Sargent as to whether or not she would be amenable to sharing the HBSG mailing list with AOS.

HOLLIMAN RESEARCH FUND: Greg Harber stated requests for proposals will be mailed soon. Scholarship money in the amount of \$2,000 will be offered. The deadline for submission will be December 15, and a report will be available for the board's consideration at the winter meeting.

President Ward reported the winter meeting will be held at Joe Wheeler State Park. President Ward stated a pelagic trip is being considered as part of the meeting.

2014 AOS Fall Meeting Compilation List Dauphin Island, Alabama, October 10-12

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE WEEKEND INCLUDED GLOSSY Ibis and Warbling Vireo. The total number of species for the meeting count period was 147.

Black-bellied Whistling Duck
Canada Goose
American Widgeon
Mallard
Mottled Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Pied-billed Grebe
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
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Mississippi Kite
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Cooper's Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Clapper Rail
Purple Gallinule
Common Gallinule
American Coot
Black-necked Stilt

American Avocet
American Oystercatcher
Black-bellied Plover
Snowy Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Piping Plover
Killdeer
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Willet
Lesser Yellowlegs
Ruddy Turnstone
Stilt Sandpiper
Sanderling
Dunlin
Least Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Phalarope
Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Caspian Tern
Common Tern
Forster's Tern
Royal Tern
Sandwich Tern
Black Skimmer
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Mourning Dove
Common Ground-Dove
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Eastern Screech Owl
Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Eastern Phoebe
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Loggerhead Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Warbling Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Tree Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Barn Swallow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Brown-headed Nuthatch
House Wren
Sedge 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

Black-and-white Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
American Redstart
Yellow Warbler
Palm Warbler
Pine Warbler
Prairie Warbler
Eastern Towhee
Lark Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Nelson's Sparrow
Seaside Sparrow
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
Northern Cardinal
Blue Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Boat-tailed Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird
House Finch
House Sparrow

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

Zion National Park

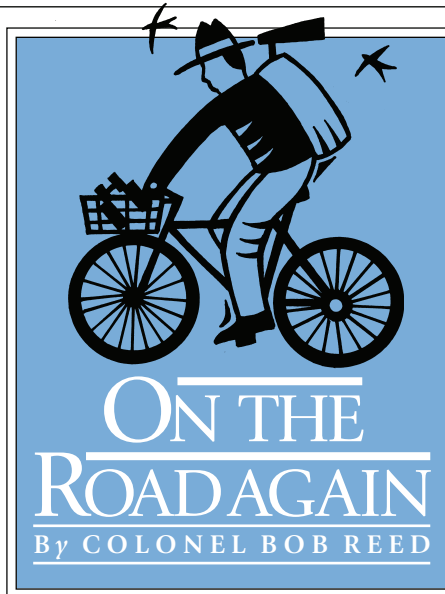
EDITOR'S NOTE—*Every now and again, The Yellowhammer has too much material for twelve pages and not enough for sixteen, and I have to delve into my unpublished archive for a story to fill the void. (This is why we need your stories, so send them in!). Following is an account of a trip to Zion National Park in 2010.*



AT AND I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to visit Zion National Park in mid-May. We are not ones for large cities—too many people. We arrived on time in Las Vegas and headed north on I-15 toward Zion. Within a few miles we were surrounded by mountains on all sides, on a collision course with the Virgin Mountains. At the last moment we came to a cleft that turned into the Virgin River Gorge. It was a breathtaking ride. I don't believe that we've ever seen anything like it. Towering above the road for hundreds of feet on either side, the walls were covered by sparse vegetation, consisting of barrel cactus, what appeared to be Joshua trees, and other desert flora. It's impossible to explain or adequately describe, but after the whole trip, we found it to be a moving experience, even on the way back.

We arrived at the Zion gate, and got a parking pass that allowed us to take our car to the lodge. As we drove up to the lodge, we noted Wild Turkeys across the street, near the bank of the North Fork of the Virgin River. We also observed sadly that no one else even seemed to notice. Little did we know that these "Wild Turkeys" were about as tame as house cats, enjoying free reign on the lawn, parking lot, and porches, and looking as though if you held the door for them, they would help themselves to the lodge.

Our dinner reservation was for 8 p.m. I expected it to be too dark to enjoy the canyon walls, but I was wrong. As we ate, at a window table, we watched the sunset turn into shadows that turned into a starlit night. It was enchanting, and while we were wired, the time zones and 2000 miles by car,



bus, train, and plane were beginning to have their effects.

Our cabin had rustic but nice furniture, a gas fireplace, and was roomy enough for two people quite comfortably. We hit the sack, and had little trouble going to sleep.

Saturday morning was crisp, but not overly cool. After breakfast, we headed out on a bird quest. We walked around in awe, the sun now lighting the east-facing walls of the valley. Everywhere we turned brought another, "Oh, look at THAT!" The first bird was a Common Raven, and the second was the first of dozens of Yellow Warblers. I

love these nifty birds, and was amazed that by the end of the day, one of the most common statements was, "Just another Yellow." Fully three-fourths of the birds seen at Zion National Park were Yellow Warblers.

But, the third bird was a really neat one, a Plumbeous Vireo, singing in the tree directly above our porch, a life bird for both of us. It was the first of several life birds that day. All this within ten steps of our cabin. Later we had good looks at our first Lucy's Warbler as we walked the bank of the river, and great looks at a pair of Canyon Wrens carrying food to a crevice in an almost sheer rock face above the river, up the path toward the Narrows, a rock formation through which we had hoped to walk; but it was closed because of the volume of water that day.

We saw many different birds carrying nesting material, building a nest or even feeding young. A Yellow Warbler carried nesting material and applied it skillfully to a nest about nine feet above the tiny path we were on. House Wrens were keeping house in several locations. A Lesser Goldfinch pair gathered nesting material right beside our cabin. Cliff Swallows were busily collecting mud and applying it to their globular homes.

Sunday morning was clear and cool. A light breeze perked things up a bit. After a breakfast of fried eggs we went walking

up the eastern side of the valley to the Grotto, where there is a picnic area and some small outbuildings.

As we emerged from the path into the picnic area, Pat saw movement ahead: a Western Tanager in bold breeding plumage. While we watched him, he joined another, and another. Before long we had spotted at least a half dozen, all very close and cooperative. One of us spotted movement in the shadows of the trees on the slope. It turned out to be a pair of Spotted Towhees, the only ones we saw on the trip.

We crossed the road and started back downstream along the river bank. The sun was high enough and to our left front so that it became a factor, but by concentrating our attention up and to the right, we had good looks at Violet-green Swallows soaring and swooping along the face of the cliffs, paus-

ing occasionally to perch on the rock for a moment before continuing their hunt. A Lucy's Warbler lurked in a clump of thick growth on the river bank. Across the river, a Yellow Warbler sang and hawked insects. A Lesser Goldfinch carried food to a hidden nest.

Nearing the lodge, and with time before checkout getting short, we had one more surprise: a Brown-crested Flycatcher perched most accommodatingly on a bare branch next to the path, apparently oblivious to the two sets of eyes taking in every detail. With an occasional foray to nab another bite of breakfast, he returned faithfully to the same perch. A life bird for Pat; I had seen one at Dauphin Island several years ago.

Zion is one of the most beautiful places we've been, well worth the trip.

A O S W I N T E R M E E T I N G , J A N U A R Y 2 3 - 2 5 , 2 0 1 5

Birding Locations near Joe Wheeler State Park

By DAMIEN SIMBECK AND STEVE McCONNELL

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Damien and Steve were kind enough to put together this list of possible places to bird if you arrive early for the AOS winter meeting, 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 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.

(Continued on page 14)

A O S W I N T E R M E E T I N G , J A N U A R Y 2 3 - 2 5 , 2 0 1 5

Meet the Speaker: Dwight Cooley

DWIGHT COOLEY came to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Complex in 1997 as the deputy project leader and was named project leader of the Wheeler NWR Complex in 2001, with responsibility for overseeing the management of Wheeler, Cahaba River, Mountain Longleaf, Watercress Darter, Sauta Cave, Fern Cave, and Key Cave National Wildlife Refuges. Other refuges where Cooley has worked include Alligator River NWR, in Manteo, North Carolina, Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR in Gautier, Mississippi, and Merritt Island NWR in Titusville,

Florida. Cooley began his service career as a wildlife biologist at the Ecological Services Field Office in Decatur, Alabama, subsequently working at the Ecological Services Field Office in Daphne, Alabama. He earned a BS in Biology from Athens College in Alabama and a MS in Zoology/Wildlife from Mississippi State University.

Dwight has spent countless hours in the field observing and documenting birds both in North Alabama and on the coast, and is one of Alabama's most experienced birders.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge—On Course for a Century of Waterbird Conservation

By DWIGHT COOLEY, Project Leader, Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Complex

DEEP IN THE THROES OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION, few visionaries recognized the significance of a seemingly local proposal to establish a migratory bird refuge on TVA lands along the middle portion of the Tennessee River in Alabama. TVA had embarked on a massive dam-building effort along the Tennessee River and in 1936, closed the gates on the newly finished Wheeler Dam. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge was established by Presidential Proclamation on July 7, 1938 as an experiment to see if wildlife could be managed on a multi-purpose reservoir. Some 35,000 acres, stretching from US 31 near Decatur upstream for 20 miles along both banks of the river, were designated a migratory bird refuge. Initially, all lands within the refuge boundary remained TVA property but, in 1959, lands above the 560-foot contour were transferred in fee-title to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Currently, the Service owns approximately 8,500 acres with the remaining lands owned by TVA.

Considered the easternmost national wildlife refuge in the Mississippi Flyway, Wheeler NWR provides winter habitat for the state's largest duck population and formerly supported the southernmost and Alabama's only major con-

centration of wintering Canada Geese. In the past, the refuge has supported up to 60,000 geese and nearly 125,000 ducks, although modern peaks are nearer 75,000 ducks and 5,000 geese. In recent years, the number of Canada Geese from the Southern James Bay population, wintering on the refuge, has declined due to a number of reasons. Snow geese are now the most prominent component of the winter goose population.

Contrary to the decline in goose numbers, the number of Sandhill Cranes wintering on the refuge has increased dramatically. Prior to 1990, Sandhill Cranes occurred sporadically in small numbers on the refuge. In 1992, three wintered on the refuge and by 2004, numbers had increased to nearly 1,500. Today, over 15,000 Sandhills winter on the refuge.

The plight of the Whooping Crane in North America has been well-chronicled. From a low of 15 birds wintering along the Texas coast in 1945, numbers had increased to nearly 250 by 1995. Because they remain critically endangered, the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership was established in 1999 to foster the development of a second migratory flock in the eastern U.S. Today, the eastern population stands at 97 birds, most nesting in Wisconsin and wintering across the southeastern U.S. Wheeler NWR has become a major wintering site for

eastern Whooping Cranes. From three birds in 2004, our wintering population has increased significantly. During the winter of 2013-2014, Whooping Crane numbers peaked at 26 birds or approximately 25% of the eastern migratory population.

The importance of Wheeler NWR and other units of the National Wildlife Refuge System to wintering migratory birds has been recognized since the first refuge was established

by Pres. Theodore Roosevelt on Pelican Island in 1903. We celebrated the Refuge System's first century of conservation in 2003. As we make our push toward 100 years of conservation at Wheeler NWR, there is not only a sense of great anticipation and dedication but also a realization that major challenges loom ahead. We'll explore not only where we are but also where we've been and where we hope to be in 2038.

BIRDING LOCATIONS *(continued from page 12)*

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.

The Point

From the small concrete bridge continue on County 40 and take the first right turn in a short distance (Point Road). Follow the road along the ridge to a stop sign. Turn right onto Lakewood View. Check area around boat ramp and the old restaurant where views of the river at the mouth of Town Creek are possible. Expect ducks, gulls, loons, etc. There are usually rafts of scaup in the area that sometimes attract rarer species. Be aware most of this area is now posted "No Trespassing."

Wilson Dam (NABT #6 & 7)

To continue route, return to County 40 and go west for around 10 miles to reach Wilson Dam—follow signs. (*Note:* To reach the dam from US 72 just east of Florence, follow signs and AL 133 south). Check visitor overlooks at the south end (last right and left turns just before starting over dam if traveling north on AL 133). Locks on the north end are closed to visitors—no access on the north end. Another spot to check is the fishing access/boat ramp area reached from AL 133 just south of the 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 the trail parking area. The main trail begins at the back of the second parking area (past res rooms). The main paved loop is around 2.5 miles long. Expect winter woodland and edge species. Eastern Screech-Owl and Barred Owl are resident.

IFDC (Wetlands) Trail

Continue west for another 0.4 miles to the next intersection (Complex F) and turn left. In 0.2 miles turn right at intersection toward the IFDC pilot plant (look for greenhouses on the left). Park in the parking lot on the left and walk the gravel road beyond for a mile or so. At the T-Intersection, walk to the left a few hundred yards to abandoned railroad tracks. Expect more winter passerine species.

Cypress Creek Waste Treatment Facility

Return to 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 the 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 in at 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.

AOS WINTER MEETING 2015

Joe Wheeler State Park, Alabama, January 23–25, 2015

FRIDAY, JANUARY 23

- 3:00 p.m. Registration—Lodge lobby
 5:00 p.m. Social Hour—Cypress Room
 6:00 p.m. Dinner from menu—Dining Room
 (open 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.)
 7:00 p.m. Members Slide Show—Cypress Room

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

- 7:00 a.m. Field Trips—meet in the lobby
 3:30 p.m. Board Meeting—Cypress Room
 5:30 p.m. Social Hour—Cypress Room
 6:30 p.m. Banquet—Cypress Room
 7:30 p.m. Business Meeting & Program—Cypress Room

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25

- 7:00 a.m. Field trips—Meet in the Lobby
 12:00 p.m. Compilation—Location TBA

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 25 rooms reserved, available through December 23.

Rooms are reserved at the lodge for a convention rate of \$64/night plus tax. The reservation numbers are 1-800-544-5639 or 256-247-5461. Please indicate that you are with AOS.

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.

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

AOS WINTER MEETING 2015 REGISTRATION FORM

Complete and return to:

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

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

Please make checks payable to AOS. Checks must be received by January 13, 2015.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail Address _____

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

Registration @ \$25 per person	\$
Banquet @ \$19 per person	\$
AOS 2015 Dues	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

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