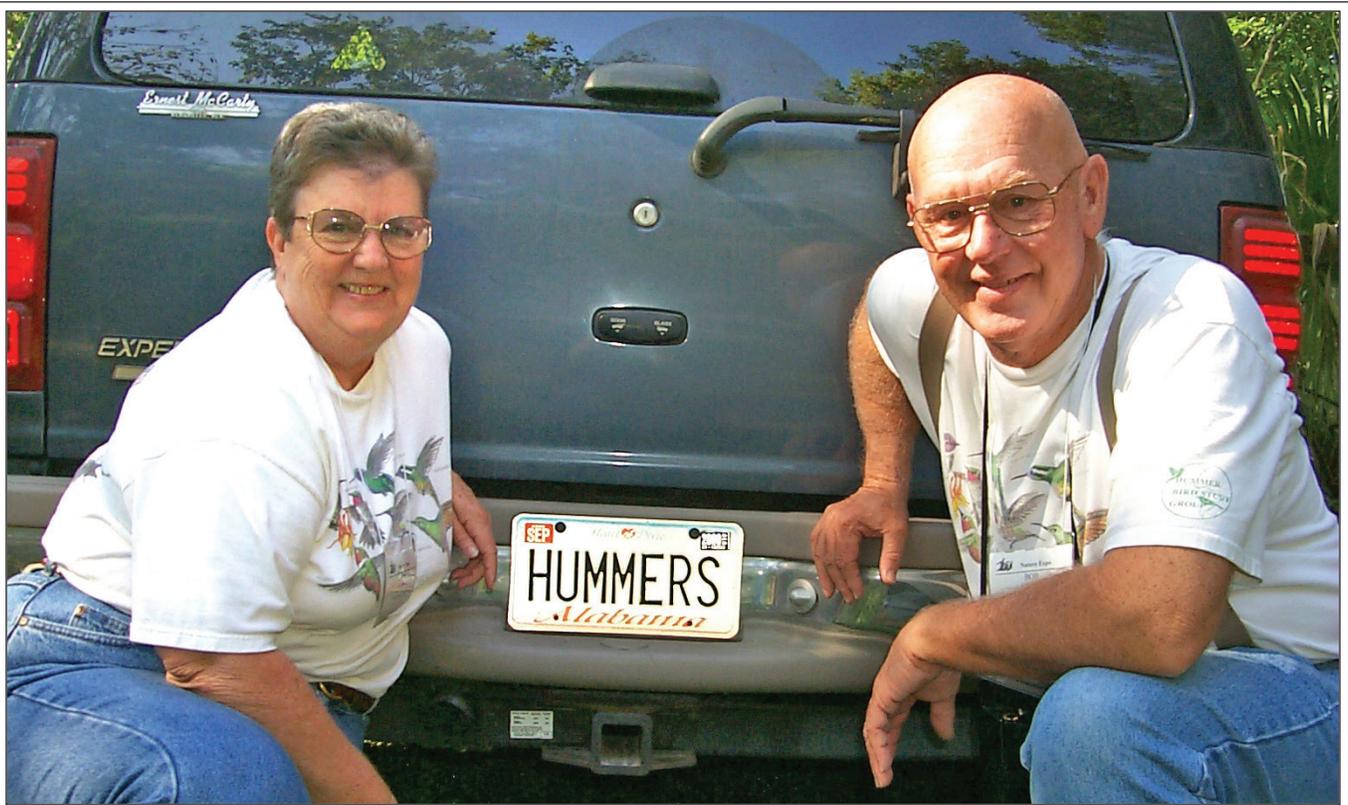


THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 37, NO. 3 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY FALL 2017

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

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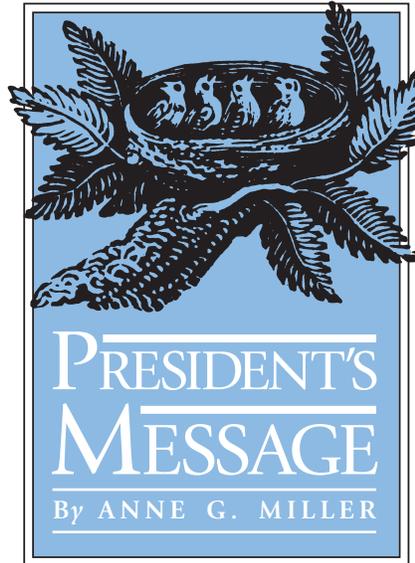
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FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS, my job as president of AOS has been mainly busywork—organizing our three yearly meetings and working to make AOS an effective organization for our members. Meanwhile, important scientific work has been going on in various AOS committees, under the leadership of some of Alabama's most distinguished amateur and professional ornithologists. For my final report to AOS members as president, I'd like to showcase the work of the Alabama Ornithological Society that supports the science of ornithology in Alabama.

The Alabama Bird Records Committee, headed by Dr. Greg Jackson of Birmingham, documents the occurrence of unusual birds in Alabama. The ABRC consists of seven experienced AOS members who review reports of rare bird sightings and vote on admission to the official state list of Alabama birds. The count right now stands at 446 species, but three of those are considered extinct (Passenger Pigeon, Carolina Parakeet, and Bachman's Warbler), and one, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, is considered extirpated from Alabama. The committee also documents unusual sightings for particular locations or times of year, and publishes a quarterly list of these sightings in *Alabama Birdlife*. Submission guidelines are available on the AOS website (aosbirds.org). As global warming continues to alter available habitat for each bird species, these lists will undoubtedly reflect many changes to Alabama's declining bird populations.

The committee also provides frequent updates for the official *Checklist of Alabama Birds*, based on the decisions of the American Ornithological Society. You'll be glad to know that the ABRC has just updated the checklist (July 2017), which you can now download on the AOS website. Thanks to the Alabama Department of Conservation, the checklist is currently being printed, and hard copies will be available at the AOS Fall Meeting on October 13-15.

Alabama Birdlife, edited by Dr. Tom Haggerty of the University of North Alabama in Florence, is published by AOS "to record and further the study of birds in Alabama and Northwest Florida." The journal provides an important outlet for ornithological research reports and short communications



on bird biology, behavior, habitat, distribution and conservation here in Alabama. A recent issue (Volume 62, number 1, June 2016) contained an article that was not only a contribution to science, but also should serve as an inspiration to younger birders. "Late Autumn Breeding by Killdeer in Central Alabama" reports on evidence of Killdeer breeding in the Montgomery area in December observed by Eric C. Soehren (a biologist with the Alabama Department of Conservation, and past president of AOS) and Ethan N. Soehren (Eric's 8-year-old son). It was Ethan who discovered the dead body of a recently-hatched Killdeer on December 3, 2016, at the Rockin' Jump

Trampoline Park in east Montgomery. Ethan immediately reported his find to Eric, who used it to document the latest date for downy young of Killdeer in Alabama, and the eighth record for late fall breeding of Killdeer in the U.S. In case you missed this article, back issues of *Alabama Birdlife* can be read on the AOS website.

AOS also encourages ornithological research in Alabama universities through its Dan C. Holliman Research Fund, chaired by Greg Harber of Birmingham. Each year the fund awards a number of small grants to support scientific research projects relevant to the biology, natural history, or conservation of Alabama birds. The awards are given to "individuals or institutions affiliated with Alabama, including graduate students (outstanding undergraduates may also apply) or others not having access to normal mainstream funding." This year's recipients receiving \$1000 each were Gary M. Manfready, PhD, of Troy University Dothan, for a population study of Purple Martins in the wiregrass region of Alabama, and Emma Rhodes, a graduate student at the University of South Alabama Foley, for a study of age-specific patterns in window mortality of birds.

One of the most important science projects ever carried out by AOS was the *Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas*, which was compiled from 2000 to 2006, and can be accessed on the AOS website. The *Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas* documents the state breeding range of 168 species of birds, using data provided by experienced AOS volunteers, conservation agencies and organizations—including the organization I led for many years,

the Alabama Wildlife Center at Oak Mountain State Park. As Alabama's oldest and largest wildlife rehabilitation center, our admissions records contain the locations of numerous nesting birds in central and north Alabama, particularly raptors. BBA Project leader Rick West and AOS volunteers Stan and Dana Hamilton spent many hours collecting data for the BBA from our admissions forms. The painstaking, five-year scientific survey conducted by AOS for the Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas provides an accurate picture of the distribution of Alabama's breeding birds in the early twenty-first century. It will continue its usefulness by providing baseline data to science so long as we humans continue to monitor the birdlife of our state.

Now, following up on the success of the *Atlas*, AOS has embarked on a new project aimed at creating a solid eBird database for Alabama. eBird, the world-wide database of bird observations managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, has already changed our understanding of bird behavior, and scientists and wildlife managers are now using the eBird database to determine bird conservation priorities. Unfortunately, Alabama's eBird reports continue to lag well behind many other states, with some parts

of Alabama seriously under-reported. Under the leadership of Greg Harber of Birmingham, and Ken Hare of Montgomery, AOS is working with eBird staff at Cornell Lab on a number of projects designed to obtain year-round observations from seldom-birded counties. Some of our AOS/eBird activities are proving successful enough to be copied by other states with under-reported areas. For more information about eBird and about current activities of the AOS/eBird Project, see the articles by Ken Hare and Neil Gilbert elsewhere in this issue. Additional information is also available on the AOS website.

But reporting to eBird is still not a habit for many of Alabama's best birders. Let me end this summary of AOS contributions to science by urging all AOS members to join eBird (ebird.org), and to start sending in your eBird checklists routinely. The skills of birding take years of serious effort to acquire. Relative to the total human population of Alabama, we birders are exceedingly rare, and thanks to eBird, each of us can help to protect Alabama's birds. Reporting your Alabama sightings to eBird—or from anywhere—contributes important data to science, whether you're in some birding hotspot, or in your own backyard.

AOS/eBird Project Making Progress

By KEN HARE



WHEN AOS DECIDED AT THE WINTER MEETING TO make it a priority to improve eBird reports from counties with low numbers of species and eBird checklists, the task looked daunting. But thanks to many AOS members, we have made significant progress in only five months.

With the help of the full AOS membership, we can and will make this happen. More later on how you can help.

It took a while to build a committee and develop a strategy to improve reporting. But we are already seeing results.

AOS President Anne Miller asked Greg Harber and me to co-chair the AOS/eBird Project Committee. The members include Anne, Neil Gilbert, Sue Moske, John Trent, and Ken Ward.

We have targeted the 16 counties in Alabama with fewer than 150 species reported on eBird. We have also targeted for special emphasis ten of those counties that had fewer than 150 complete eBird checklists as of late February.

The gaps in eBird reports in some of these 16 counties are impressive. For comparison, note that Mobile County as of February had more than 14,000 complete checklists on eBird. Fayette County had 25. That's right—just 25 eBird checklists all time. Lamar County with 33 and Crenshaw County with 34 checklists all-time were not much better.

One tactic we are using as part of our overall strategy is to schedule periodic field trips to some of the counties with the lowest number of species. Co-chair Greg Harber is leading this effort, which we are calling our "Bird and Barbecue Blitz." (The field trips will involve stops at the county's best BBQ restaurant, if one is available.) Trips are open to everyone. Our first trip, to Fayette County, was a fun and productive day that produced six new species.

Another tactic involves asking experienced birders to "adopt" one or more of the 16 counties. Several AOS members who are excellent birders have stepped up to take on

counties. They include Neil Gilbert (Bibb and Greene); Carrie Threadgill (Chilton); Judy and Don Self (Choctaw); John Trent (Crenshaw); Ken Ward (Marion); Geoff Hill (Pike and Randolph); Jordan Broadhead (Walker); Frank Farrell (Conecuh); and Larry Gardella (Washington). I'm not in their class as a field birder, but I'm taking on Lamar County. So you don't have to be an outstanding birder to help.

We still need additional birders willing to adopt counties, which involves a commitment to bird there at least four times a year and to do at least four complete checklists for *each* trip. It's great for more than one person to adopt a county, and even better to partner with someone. But even if you don't feel comfortable making that commitment, even one birding trip in a county is helpful, as long as you file a complete checklist. (Details on what makes a complete checklist are on the eBird website, but in short it involves reporting all birds you see or hear and can identify. Note that eBird does not expect you to see or hear all birds at a site or to be able to ID them all.)

Another tactic involves working with eBird to develop a contest for anyone who files a complete checklist from any of the 16 counties by the end of the year. The more checklists, the greater your chances to win two free nights lodging on Dauphin Island next year in October or April, the height of migration. Other prizes are being offered by eBird. For details, see the AOS website. (aosbirds.org)

Another way AOS members can help is by entering old checklists of birding trips to any of the 16 counties listed below. As most of you know, you can always keep your own personal checklists on eBird. But for the sightings to count in county species totals or as complete checklists, you have to have other information, such as the date of the sighting, the approximate time, and the location as precisely as possible.

If you have lists with this type of data from any of the targeted counties, please enter them into eBird. If you have a record of a sighting of only a single uncommon bird, but with date, time and place information, that could help as well.

In the chart to the right are the numbers from late February through the end of July.

The first list covers the 16 counties with fewer than 150 species. We've added 125 new county species in five months, raising the average species per county from 127 to 135. Two counties, Randolph and Walker, are already at 150 or more, but we need to keep pushing for additional checklists there.

The second list covers the ten counties with fewer than 150 checklists. The number of all-time checklists is up by 613, from an average per county of 80 to 141. In other words, in five months the all-time checklists in these ten counties are up 76 percent. Now that is impressive.

Thanks for the hard work of the committee and of those who have adopted a county or others who have simply birded in a county and filed a complete eBird checklist.

County Species	February	July
Bibb	140	141
Blount	144	144
Chilton	129	139
Choctaw	122	134
Coffee	133	133
Conecuh	131	137
Crenshaw	104	122
Fayette	111	120
Greene	133	146
Lamar	96	114
Marion	118	123
Pickens	137	141
Pike	125	131
Randolph	139	151
Walker	137	144
Washington	147	151
Total	2,046	2,171
Average	127.9	135.7

County Lists	February	July
Choctaw	58	164
Conecuh	53	85
Crenshaw	34	116
Fayette	25	55
Greene	138	371
Lamar	33	53
Marion	131	142
Pickens	118	129
Pike	99	152
Walker	117	152
Total	806	1,419
Average	80.6	141.9

Three Reasons to Become an eBirder

By NEIL GILBERT



MY LIFE CHANGED ON AUGUST 1, 2007. ALTHOUGH I don't remember much from that day, I do know that I went birding—starting at Peters Canyon Regional Park near my home in Orange, California. I rode the three miles on my bike, since I did not yet possess a driver's license. I birded for two hours that morning and saw California specialties liable to incite jealousy in Alabama birders—California Gnatcatcher, Nuttall's Woodpecker, and Wrentit, to name a few. The most unusual bird was an American Wigeon, a migrant several weeks ahead of its typical arrival in southern California.

I know these details about that morning because I submitted an eBird checklist, my first ever. In the subsequent decade, I have submitted over five thousand! In my journey as an ardent eBirder, I have learned a tremendous amount about birds, particularly about their status and distribution.

If you have never participated, I would like to share three of the ways in which eBird has enriched my experience as a birder in the hope that you will join me.

eBird is an online database of bird observations to which anyone can contribute from anywhere in the world. Known as citizen science, eBird harnesses the observational powers of many, many birders and is generating a massive dataset used by scientists to study bird populations. Although eBird's contribution to science is notable, I will focus on the ways eBird can personally benefit the birder.

First, eBird provides a platform upon which to record your birding activity and observations. Unless you are blessed with an extraordinary memory, it is unlikely that you can remember what birds you saw on that trip to Dauphin Island 10 years (or months) ago. With eBird, you record (at a minimum!) where you went birding, what species you saw, how many of each species you observed, and with whom you birded.

Optionally, you can record notes, about a species or the outing. And, my favorite option, you can imbed photos in a checklist. Submission is becoming ever more streamlined—

in fact, apps are available for both iOS and Android, so you can submit observations in real time from the field.

Second, eBird automatically calculates your lists—every list imaginable. Gone are the days of paid list-keeping software, clunky lists managed in Microsoft Excel, or hand-scribbled lists on paper taped to the refrigerator. As you submit your eBird lists, you can watch your lists grow under the “My eBird” tab—your life list, state lists, county lists, and year lists.

My favorite listing feature on eBird is the ability to track “Patch” lists from your favorite birding localities. A patch can be a single location (such as my Tuscaloosa subdivision, where I have logged 112 species) or a conglomeration of locations (for example, Damien Simbeck tracks a Northwest Alabama patch to monitor the birds he has seen there). For those who harbor obsessive tendencies, you can subscribe to “Needs” alerts, which will notify you via email when someone reports a species that you have not observed in the location of interest.

Third, eBird has become instrumental for planning birding trips and learning the status and distribution of birds in unfamiliar locations. Let's say you are an out-of-state birder with an upcoming business trip to Birmingham. With a quick search for “Jefferson County, Alabama” on the “Explore a Region” option, you can discover the best birding hotspots (in case you were wondering, Ruffner Mountain is top, with 155 species observed). With the “Illustrated Checklist” option, you can peruse the county list and browse bar charts showing the seasonal abundance of each species. You can also see the top birders in the county, by both number of species and number of checklists submitted (it's Ken Wills, with 208 and 982, respectively). With this information, our hypothetical birder will decide to spend his free morning birding at Ruffner Mountain. And he might even reach out to Ken to ask if he wants to accompany him birding.

These are just a few of the ways in which eBird can benefit you as a birder. I strongly encourage you to make eBird a regular habit. Every observation is valuable and contributes to our knowledge of birds. For tips on getting started, the “Help” tab on the eBird homepage provides instructions for submitting checklists and answers to frequently asked questions.

Neil Gilbert is pursuing an MS in biology at the University of Alabama, researching habitat associations of grassland species in the Black Belt region of Alabama and Mississippi. He is a member of AOS and serves on the AOS/eBird Project Committee.

AOS FALL MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, OCTOBER 13-15, 2017

AOS Fall Meeting Schedule



UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL ACTIVITIES BEGIN OR occur at the Dauphin Island United Methodist Church (DIUMC), 302 Key Street, Dauphin Island, AL 36528. All field trips meet in the DIUMC parking lot except Sunday morning. Full descriptions of field trips appear on pages 9-10.

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

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2017

7:30 a.m. Field Trip: Fort Morgan, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, and Gulf State Park
 Trip Leaders: Dr. Frank Moore, Andrew Haffenden

Note: We will take the 8 a.m. ferry from Dauphin Island to Fort Morgan, arriving about 8:30 a.m. Those driving south on Friday morning can join us at the Fort.

5:00 p.m. REGISTRATION, SOCIAL HOUR
 Non-alcoholic beverages only
 Where: DIUMC

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. Photography Contest Awards and Slide Show of Winning Entries

7:30 p.m. Workshop by Bob and Lucy Duncan
Understanding the Effects of Weather on Bird Migration in the Northern Gulf of Mexico

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2017

7:00 a.m. Field Trip 1: Exploring Dauphin Island with Dr. Frank Moore
Field Trip 2: Birds of Pelican Bay Peninsula with Andrew Haffenden

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

2:00 p.m. Board Meeting at DIUMC

5:30 p.m. BANQUET AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER
 Where: DIUMC

5:30 p.m. Social Hour—non-alcoholic beverages only. Donations benefit the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary

6:30 p.m. Banquet

7:15 p.m. Announcements

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Frank Moore, Distinguished Emeritus Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Southern Mississippi—*The Importance of Stopovers for Neotropical Migrants*

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2017

7:30 a.m. Field Trip to Blakeley Island Mud Lakes
 Where: Green Park (next to Ship & Shore)

12:00 p.m. Compilation (Includes all bird sightings in Mobile and Baldwin Counties from noon, Friday, October 13, 2017, to noon Sunday.)
 Hosts: Ann McLaurin and Lynne Fitzgerald
 Across the street from the Goat Trees.

Fort Morgan Event to Honor the Sargents

THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY IS PLACING TWO benches and a plaque at Fort Morgan in honor of Bob and Martha Sargent, who banded nearly 300 species of birds at Fort Morgan from 1989 until shortly before Bob's death in 2014. Over the years Bob and Martha shared their wisdom and knowledge and love of birds with their dedicated volunteers as well as with throngs of visitors to Fort Morgan. There will be a brief dedication ceremony on Friday, October 13, 2017, during an AOS field trip to Fort Morgan in conjunction with the AOS Fall Meeting on Dauphin Island. Photos of the dedication ceremony will be shown at the meeting Friday evening.

Fall Meeting Accommodations

BE SURE TO MAKE RESERVATIONS EARLY FOR AOS MEETINGS ON Dauphin Island as accommodations are limited.

Websites:

www.gulfinfo.com

www.dauphinisland.chamber.com

Motels:

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

Bed and Breakfast:

Dauphin Island Harbor House: 251-861-2119

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)

Air BnB has lots of rentals! www.airbnb.com

AOS Fall Meeting Field Trips

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2017

Fort Morgan, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge and Gulf State Park

Trip Leaders: Dr. Frank Moore, Andrew Haffenden

Meeting Time: 7:30 a.m.

Meeting Place: DIUMC Parking Lot

Dr. Frank Moore, AOS Keynote Speaker, and Andrew Haffenden, AOS Field Trip Chair, will lead this trip across the bay. Dr. Moore has studied migrating birds for many years, and Fort Morgan was one of his long-term banding stations. No one knows southeast bird migration patterns better than Dr. Moore, and we will enjoy both birding and learning about migration with him on this trip. We'll be holding a brief dedication ceremony for an AOS memorial to Bob and Martha Sargent in the area where the Sargents

banded birds for many years, and we'll also have time to look at the historic fort. After Fort Morgan we travel along the Fort Morgan Peninsula to Gulf Shores. After a seafood lunch in a private room at the Original Oyster House (non-seafood is also available), we'll check out the State Park pier for seabirds. If time permits, on the return to the ferry we'll stop to walk the Jeff Friend Trail in Bon Secour Wildlife Refuge. As with all outings, bird activity and weather will determine our time at any destination. We'll take the ferry back to Dauphin Island, arriving before 5 p.m.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2017

Field Trip 1: Exploring Dauphin Island with Dr Frank Moore

Trip Leader: Dr. Frank Moore

Meeting Time: 7:00 a.m.

Meeting Place: DIUMC Parking Lot

We'll bird the varied habitats of Dauphin Island with our Keynote Speaker Dr. Frank Moore, 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 Jenny Stowers' house, overlooking Bayou Heron and Graveline Bay.

Field Trip 2: Birds of Pelican Island

Trip Leader: Andrew Haffenden

Meeting Time: 7:15 a.m.

Meeting Place: DIUMC Parking Lot

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 2 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 Tern, 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 15, 2017

Field Trip to Blakeley Island Mud Lakes

Trip Leader: TBA

Meeting Time: 7:30 a.m.

Meeting Place: Green Park (next to Ship & Shore)

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, Stilt 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 Mississippi Kites. 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 this outing. We will have copies of the form available for you to fill out at the Friday night Potluck. Click here: <http://www.aosbirds.org/alabama-birding/blakeley-island/> if you wish to register on your own in advance. Registration is valid for the rest of the current year.

A O S F A L L M E E T I N G , O C T O B E R 1 3 - 1 5 , 2 0 1 7

Meet the Speaker: Frank R. Moore, PhD

FRANK MOORE is the Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Southern Mississippi. He received his PhD from Clemson University, where he studied under Sidney Gauthreaux Jr., who was a student of George H. Lowery Jr. Frank is a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society, member of the editorial board for several scientific journals, past president of the Cooper Ornithological Society, member of the scientific advisory board for the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, former member of the board of trustees of the Nature Conservancy Mississippi, and recent recipient of the Margaret Morse Nice Award from the Wilson Ornithological Society and the George H. Lowery Award from the Louisiana Ornithological Society.

Frank is an avian biologist whose internationally recognized research program is organized around the challenges migratory birds face when they stop over during passage, how migrants contend with those challenges, and the consequences of events that arise during migration. He and his students have conducted field work at sites across North America, Europe, and Central America, but most notably along the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Their work has yielded over 125 peer-reviewed publications and has been funded continuously by a variety of organizations and agencies, including the National Geographic Society, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, National Park Service, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, NOAA/Sea Grant, and the National Science Foundation.

Migratory Songbirds and the Gulf of Mexico

By FRANK R. MOORE

SOMETIME DURING ONE OF YOUR FALL BIRDING TRIPS, YOU will encounter a young Red-eyed Vireo—maybe she will be searching for insect prey in the Audubon Bird Sanctuary on Dauphin Island. Successfully fledged from her boreal forest birthplace, she is now on the move to Brazilian winter quarters several thousand miles away. Migratory songbirds can move awe-inspiring distances, often over large inhospitable landscapes. Yet, rarely do they migrate non-stop; rather they stopover periodically, sometimes for a few hours, sometimes days. Indeed, most time during migration is spent on stopover where migrants build up fuel stores for consumption during flight. Traveling long distances across areas that vary in suitability comes with considerable risks, and the mortality associated with migration may be substantial. When she stops en route to rest and refuel, she finds herself in unfamiliar surroundings at a time when energy demands may be high, faced with the need to acquire food in a short period of time, while balancing conflicting demands of predator avoidance and food acquisition, competition with

other migrants and resident birds for limited resources, the possibility of unfavorable weather, exposure to parasites and pathogens, lost sleep, not to mention the need to make judicious decisions about departure in relation to the Gulf of Mexico and beyond. How well she meets these challenges will determine the success of her migration, while a successful migration is measured in terms of her survival and future reproductive performance.

Over the past 25 plus years, my students and I have studied how migratory birds contend with the challenges that arise during passage, the consequences of meeting those challenges, and the conservation status of stopover habitat so critical to migration. We have done so at places across North America, Italy, Sweden, and Honduras, but most notably along the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Twice a year the northern Gulf coast receives a huge pulse of bird diversity as literally millions of migratory songbirds arrive in coastal habitats. These habitats provide critical resources for intercontinental migratory songbirds, the majority of which travel across or around the Gulf of Mexico every spring and fall as they move between temperate breeding grounds in North America and tropical wintering grounds in the Caribbean and Central and South America. One of our long-term migration stations is located on Fort Morgan Peninsula within the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge. Working continuously from 1990 through 2015, we gathered information on nearly 80,000 individuals banded at our station during fall migration—information on passage phenology, energetic status and refueling rates, diet, foraging behavior, response to predators and competitors, effects of weather events, direction finding ability, and departure decisions as birds continued on their journey.

Coastal ecosystems are among the world's most biodiverse, supporting an incredible and dynamic assembly of species. These ecosystems are increasingly being impacted by natural and anthropogenic stressors including climate change, pollution, disrupted hydrology, and habitat destruction or degradation from human activities. The human population on the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast has increased at a rate more than double the national average while wetland habitats are being lost faster than anywhere else in the U.S. Although these changes have largely unknown consequences for the billions of birds that rely on coastal habitats during migration, it is possible that these changes are negatively impacting bird population.

Analyses of available long-term data sets reveal population declines among many intercontinental migratory species over the last 40 years. Although the causes of declines are hard to identify, research has largely overlooked the importance of events during migration. Yet, the habitat loss and degradation that affect migratory songbirds during breeding and winter residency must also affect them during migration. Rapid landscape and habitat changes occurring in coastal areas may disproportionately impact species that are dependent on coasts for emergencies or refueling before long flights. That said, we know little, for example, about the distribution and spatial extent of human development in relation to the airspace corridors and stopover habitat used by migrating birds, nor do we understand when and where species and specific populations move through the Gulf coast. The good news is that it is now increasingly possible to fill these information gaps with Gulf-wide analyses of citizen science (eBird), weather surveillance radar, tracking, stable isotope, and genetic data to understand the role of coastal habitat in migratory bird populations. We must decipher the distribution, timing, and habitat associations of migrants, the characteristics and quality of habitat occupied during stopover, migratory connectivity (where has the bird been and where is it going), and threats to and current conservation status of stopover habitat. Our research along the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico continues to fill important gaps in our knowledge about the biology of migratory birds during passage and how to craft effective conservation plans that include the migration phase of the annual cycle.

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Winter 2017

November 10, 2017

Spring 2018

February 10, 2018

Upcoming Meetings

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 26-28, 2018

Winter Meeting, Location TBA

THIRD FRIDAY—April 20-22, 2018

Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island

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