

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 40, NO. 1 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPRING 2020

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

FOUNDED 1952



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APPROPRIATELY ENOUGH, I began 2019—the year in which I would ascend to the AOS presidency—chasing birds in Alabama. I had spent half of the previous year in Australia, missing spring migration entirely, and I was itching to get re-acquainted with Alabama birds. I'll contend that I didn't set out to do a big year in 2019, but I was intent on seeing as many species in Alabama as I could. (Most people would not see a difference between those two goals.)

2019 turned out to be a great year to build a big list. There was a nearly constant stream of unusual birds reported in Alabama in 2019, and the parade of rarities started in January. Baldwin County hosted Allen's and Black-chinned Hummingbirds; Mobile County had Vermillion Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Black Scoter, Great Black-backed Gull, and Eared Grebe; Houston County had Western Tanager and Bullock's Oriole; a Smith's Longspur turned up in a flock of Lapland Longspurs in Morgan County; and, at the Winter AOS meeting, lucky society members on the boat trip on Wheeler Reservoir were treated to Red-throated Loon, Pacific Loon, and Common Merganser. By the end of January, I had a whopping (given my expectations) 167 species.

The run of rarities didn't let up as winter transitioned to spring. A White-winged Scoter spent late winter at the water treatment plant in Inverness in Shelby County, and in late March, I kicked up a Western Meadowlark near the museum at Fort Morgan. I also started a run of luck that carried through my year of bird chasing. A Yellow-headed Blackbird began visiting a yard in Foley on March 20 when I was busy at work and tired of chasing birds. For more than a week I didn't go after the rarity, expecting it to disappear. Such a lackadaisical approach is generally the death of the big year. Totally focused big year listers will run after a bird within the same day if they can. Too many rarities do not stick around. I estimate that most rare birds are gone within a few days of when they are first discovered, and many are gone within 24 hours. So waiting 10 days like I did was essentially begging to have one species deducted from my year total. Against



the odds, the blackbird hung around (it turned out that this bird lingered until May) and I watched it come to the feeder ten days after it was first spotted.

In contrast to the winter full of rarities, it was an ordinary spring migration in Alabama with few surprises; however, all of the regular suspects made an appearance. By birding more than I probably should have (I work full time), I was able to track down all of the regular spring migrants. I did have a regrettable miss on my way home from an exhausting early May birding weekend on Dauphin Island—I drove right past a Hudsonian Godwit that I didn't know was at Blakeley Island. I could have driven back down to Blakeley Island from my home in Auburn the next morning and seen that bird, but I didn't.

I can't say that I now second-guess my decision not to repeat an eight hour round trip the day after I had just gotten home. Even big years need a dose of sanity. But the godwit was one less bird that I tallied on my big year.

A key to any big year is getting offshore in a boat to look for pelagic birds. There are no regularly scheduled Alabama pelagic charters. If you want offshore birds for a big year, you have to organize your own trip, so I organized a 2019 Alabama pelagic trip. On August 10, fourteen AOS members piled onto a charter boat and chugged to deep water due south of Orange Beach. It turned out to be a moderately rough and mostly frustrating adventure. The seas had just enough roll that it was uncomfortable for many of us land-lovers, and the abundant spring rains had muddied the Gulf as far out as we could get in a one-day venture. Birds like Bridled Terns and Audubon's Shearwaters prefer to forage over "blue water"—the clear and deep water that sits over the continental slope. This year, because of discharge from rivers, blue water was so far out it was essentially unreachable. We almost struck out entirely on pelagic birds, but by laying down an oil slick in the deepest water area that we reached, we did draw in single Wilson's and two Band-rumped Storm Petrels. We missed jaegers, Bridled and Sooty Terns, and all shearwaters. It ended up being a lot of pain and expense for two year-birds.

Late summer and early fall is typically hot and not particularly interesting, but state birders turned up a succession of mega-rarities in August and September 2019 including Fulvous Whistling-duck, Red Phalarope, Sabine's Gull, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and Brown Booby. I was particularly proud of my effort to get the Brown Booby. It was spotted from the Waterloo waterfront, in extreme Northwest Alabama, hanging out a half mile across the lake on some rocky structure. It was a long view under the best of conditions and if the bird perched on the wrong side of the rocks, it was completely out of view. I decided to bring a kayak with me to paddle out and have a decent look at the bird. Good thing I brought my boat because the booby was not in view when I arrived (at the end of four-and-a-half-hour drive). To my disappointment, it was also not present when I made the long paddle across rough water out to the rocks. It seemed the bird had moved on. But then I noticed a raft of cormorants sitting on the lake west of me, so I paddled for 15 minutes towards the cormorants. Finally, I spotted a suspicious bird in amongst the cormorants—it was the Brown Booby and it did not look healthy. I paddled right up to it, literally 5 feet away and it didn't even look at me. It seemed to be dying. It was not seen again after I saw it, and I have to presume it died a short time after I found it. No way would I have seen that bird without paddling out to it.

I passed 300 on my year list on August 9. In my opinion, 300 is an outstanding year total for Alabama, and there were times early in 2019 when, in calculating what birds were left, I wasn't sure I would make 300. I reached 308 on September 6 and 312 on September 28. Birds 308 and 312 were significant milestones for me because in 1996 Adam Byrne and I did big years together and I ended up with 307 species while Adam tallied 311. (You can read an account of that 1996 big year at www.ornithologistsblog.com). Going into 2019, my goal was to beat my personal record and then to best Adam's old record. Once I had passed Adam's record, I simply wanted to see how high I could push the total. To my knowledge, only three birders have surpassed 320 in Alabama state big years. Greg Jackson did it first in 1998, tallying 326. Steve McConnell followed with an impressive 331 in 2009. Howard Horne holds the current record with a mind-boggling total of 335 tallied in 2012. So, 320 was a natural goal once I had passed 311.

I finished the year with a succession of rare bird sightings. A flock of about a dozen Swainson's Hawks lingered into

November in Baldwin County, giving me a chance to see this species after I missed it in October. In December, a Groove-billed Ani hung around the fort at Fort Morgan Historic Site just long enough for me to find it the morning after it was discovered. The ani was, remarkably, my ninth new state bird for the year. To put this in context, I had only added about 25 new species in the twenty years since the turn of the twenty-first century. 2019 was a really good year for a big year.

When I watched a Calliope Hummingbird come to a feeder near Dothan, I tallied my 319th and final bird for the year. I only included officially accepted state birds in amassing my list. Thus, even though I saw Mute Swan, Scaly-breasted Munia, and Whooping Crane in the state, I did not include them in my 319 total because they are not on the current state list. The big year was a fun distraction, but I have no desire to ever do that again. I have much more fun roaming around Alabama working on my county lists.

AOS Spring Meeting Silent Auction

IT'S TIME FOR THE SILENT AUCTION AT THE SPRING AOS meeting. We are raising money to train teachers to use Flying WILD curriculum, which is a whole school approach to teaching environmental education through the focus of birds. Although the curriculum is geared for middle school students, I have used the curriculum with students age 3 to 99+. We have been able to provide this training to over 400 classroom teachers, nature center and museum educators, and pre-service teachers in Alabama. I may even have a game or two at the silent auction for you to play, too!

As you start spring cleaning, find a bargain at a store, or see that sale on the Internet, think about the AOS silent auction and start collecting items to bring to the meeting. If you are not attending the meeting, please contact me, and we will work out a way to pick up your donation. We have received a donation from the estate of Mary Porter of many books ranging from field guides to coffee table bird books. In addition to books, we have a tripod, jewelry, T-shirts, and candles. What can you add to the auction?

We look forward to seeing you at the spring meeting. Don't forget to bring your check book or cash! Bid high and bid often!!!

—Shirley Farrell



Jackie Barry Earns First Prize in the AOS Student Poster Competition

ON FRIDAY EVENING, DURING THE SOCIAL HOUR BEFORE member's photos, everyone enjoyed the first AOS Student Poster competition. Ten graduate and postdoctoral students from the Department of Biological Sciences and the School of Forestry and Wildlife at Auburn University competed for \$250 in prize money that was made possible by a donation to the AOS by Bob and Elissa Ritchey. An often-stated goal at recent AOS meetings is to bring more young people into our group. The poster competition was established to encourage young ornithologists in the state to become active AOS members. Students presented on a range of bird-related topics including genetics, physiology, pigmentation, forest management, and conservation. Poster presentations were three foot by four foot printed summaries of research with photos, charts, and diagrams. Each student stood near his or her poster and answered questions. Judges Lew Scharpf, Eric Soehren, and Scott Rush evaluated the ten posters and announced that all of the posters were outstanding, and that they all scored within a point of each other.

Jackie Barry was awarded first prize for her study of the genes that determine feather coloration in hawks. Runner-up awards went to Hailey Parry for her research on the physiology of long and short-distance migrants and to Brian Klingbeil for his studies on the effects of noise pollution on bird populations.

AOS Poster contestants (left to right): Molly Folkerts Caldwell, Hailey Parry, Natalie Harris, Matt Powers, Jackie Barry, Nicholas Justyn, Brian Klingbeil, and Jessica Colbaugh. (Bob Reed)

Donations and Honoraria

Donation to Scholarship Fund: Ken and Rufina Ward
 Madison Garden Club: Honorarium for Harry Dean speaking to their club

AOS extends a special thank you to Hal Smith of Wild Birds Unlimited of Auburn for his very generous and gracious donation for the door prize at the Winter AOS winter meeting. The winner received a beautiful recycled plastic birdfeeder and a complimentary bag of quality birdseed. Thank you Hal!

Upcoming Meetings

SPRING MEETING—April 17-19, 2020
 Dauphin Island, Alabama

FALL MEETING—October 9-12, 2020
 Dauphin Island, Alabama

WINTER MEETING—January 22-24, 2021
 Guntersville, Alabama (tentative)

AOS WINTER MEETING, AUBURN, ALABAMA, JANUARY 24-26, 2020

AOS Winter Meeting Report

By KEN HARE & GEOFF HILL



THE WINTER AOS MEETING HAD THE USUAL EXCITING and productive field trips in search of bird species, but added some different types of field trips as well—visiting the Southeastern Raptor Center at Auburn University and browsing through the collection of 3,000 bird specimen skins in the Auburn University collection.

In addition, the organization's first meeting at Auburn University generated some great sightings of birds in the wild, including a hard-to-find Bachman's Sparrow and several rare Red-cockaded Woodpeckers.

The primary venue for the meeting was the Rouse Life Sciences Building and an adjacent auditorium. The university setting for the meeting permitted bird-related activities beyond the typical field trips.

Weekend activities kicked off with a trip to the Southeastern Raptor Center at Auburn University on Friday afternoon. Members toured the facility, and viewed about two dozen eagles, falcons, hawks, vultures, and owls, birds that for whatever reason are no longer suited for living in the wild. We also saw from a distance the recovery facilities for birds that are being treated prior to being released. They also had a very close-up and personal visit with the new Auburn War Eagle, Aurea.

On Friday night members also enjoyed three photo presentations. The first, by Bill McAllister, featured very close views of a rookery near St. Augustine Beach, Florida. Then Eric Soehren shared an update on Loggerhead Shrikes, which are suffering an alarming decline throughout their range in the Midwest and East. He pointed out the current banding project, and asked us to closely examine any banded bird, and report the order and colors of bands on both right and left legs to loggerheadshrike.org. Geoff Hill wrapped up with stunning pictures from his recent trip to Portugal.

Featured speaker for the weekend was Dr. Scott Rush, associate professor, wildlife ecology and management at Mississippi State University. Scott's research focuses on the

conservation of birds in the Gulf Coast region including particularly trans-Gulf migrants and species that depend on coastal wetlands. During his Saturday evening banquet speech, Scott shared some of his latest findings on the status of Gulf Coast birds and approaches to better conserving birds in our region.

The weather was unseasonably warm and pleasant for Saturday morning field trips and AOS members chose between a trip to Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge or to West Point dam and reservoir, both on the Georgia border. Eufaula is renowned for waterfowl and marsh bird diversity while West Point Reservoir can be fantastic for winter diving birds such as sea ducks, loons, and grebes.

Geoff Hill led the trip to Eufaula focusing on Lake Point State Park, immediately adjacent to Eufaula NWR, as well as the auto tour in the Uplands and Houston Units of the refuge. Duck numbers have dropped precipitously at Eufaula NWR over the past decade when the planting of grain crops was halted. Still, the birding group found a few flocks of ducks that included Blue-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, and Wood Duck. Coot numbers were down from previous years but Common Gallinules were, in fact, common. The highlight of the trip for some was a Fox Sparrow that popped up for some to see. The group also turned up some birds that are hard to find inland in the winter in Alabama such as Sedge Wrens, Marsh Wrens, and Greater Yellowlegs. Raptors were in view all morning with repeated sightings of Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, as well as the ubiquitous Red-tailed Hawks. The highlight of the trip for birders focused on finding rarities was a pair of Tree Swallows hawking insects over the marsh. These were the first January Tree Swallows anyone in the group had ever seen at Eufaula, and it was our only species flagged as rare by eBird. The group enjoyed a brunch at the Blue Moon Café in downtown Eufaula before heading back to Auburn.

Barry Fleming led the group to West Point Reservoir (which proved to be very seasonably cold). That field trip



AOS winter meeting field trip participants scan the water for ducks, gulls, and terns on the Alabama side of the West Point Reservoir on a chilly day in January. (Ken Hare)

got off to a bang before the caravan had even come to a halt. A shorebird with long, bright yellow legs, about the size of neighboring killdeer, was spotted from 20 mph. After pulling over, and with good views, the bird was identified as Lesser Yellowlegs, which represents the only winter eBird record of this species in Troup County, Georgia. Surprisingly, no ducks were on the large body of water above the dam, but Ring-billed Gull, Forster's Terns and more than 200 Bonaparte's Gulls were observed, both resting and flying. The western shore of the lake is in Alabama but the majority of open water is in Georgia. So, it was quite a treat to see 22 Common Goldeneyes and 26 Buffleheads near the shore in Alabama waters. Horned Grebes are fairly common here in winter, but only one flying bird was seen. How often is the only grebe sighting of a flying bird? A fallback plan for the paucity of ducks was the small water treatment plant in Lanett, which produced close up views of loafing Ring-neck Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Mergansers, and one shy Ruddy Duck. Notable were the numbers of Bald Eagles seen. A pair of adults actually flew over the town of Lanett upon our arrival, and our group had multiple eagles flying above our heads most of the morning, offering good lessons in social behavior,

vocalization and four-year plumage cycle. In the warming sunshine of the morning, good numbers of raucous Red-headed Woodpeckers appeared, and a big flock of Pine Warblers, Bluebirds, and Chipping Sparrows worked the fields, with other species arriving and departing, leaving the group with many satisfying looks.

On Saturday afternoon, Geoff Hill, who is curator of birds for the Auburn University Natural History Museum, opened the bird collection to members. Folks were permitted to handle and study any of the 3,000 bird study skins that are housed in the collection. Geoff and his graduate students answered questions about how specimens are

prepared and curated and went looking for specific bird specimens that members wanted to see. For many participants, it was their first experience handling bird museum specimens.

The final field trip of the weekend headed out early Sunday morning (meeting at 5:30 a.m.) to a private quail plantation on the Macon/Bullock county line near Hurtsboro, about a 45-minute drive from Auburn. Geoff Hill arranged permission to access one edge of the expansive estate where there are active clusters of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. This site is a wonderful example of private land conservation, because the owners of this property actively recruited woodpeckers and diligently maintain the landscape with controlled burning to be ideal not only for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers but also for essentially all of the native pine savannah plants and animals. The group was treated not only to extended and close views of an estimated six Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, but also to Common Ground-dove and, unexpectedly, to Bachman's Sparrow. In the spring, Bachman's Sparrows sing in abundance in this pine-savannah habitat but in the winter they go silent and are very hard to find. By remarkable luck, and a lot of patience, a Bachman's Sparrow popped up into a bush near the group and sat motionless for ten minutes while everyone in the group scrutinized and photographed it. All three birds were lifers for many in the group. It was a fun and productive way to end our weekend of birding in East Alabama.

AOS WINTER MEETING, AUBURN, ALABAMA, JANUARY 24-26, 2020

Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By PAT REED, *Secretary*



THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY BOARD of Directors met January 25, 2020, in 308 Funchess Hall, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama. President Geoff Hill called the meeting to order at 3pm.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Joan Dixon reported for the year 2019. AOS income was \$20,030.23 less expenses of \$29,848.05 leaving a net income loss of \$9,817.82; however when added to existing assets, the total assets are \$51,295.30. AOS has a CD in the amount of \$28,943.44 that matures January 27, 2020. Ken Hare moved the CD be split into two, one for \$10,000 and one for the remainder (\$18,988.34) and renegotiated for the best interest rate, over a three-year period. Anne Miller seconded, and the motion was approved.

Mrs. Dixon reported on PayPal costs and charges. After discussion Bob Reed moved that an additional 3% charge be added to all PayPal transactions on the web site and in *The Yellowhammer*. Ken Hare seconded and the motion was approved.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Geoff Hill stated that Yahoo will no longer host ALbirds and reported a new host has been located that appears to be working well. He suggested this be left as is for the present. The new ALbirds is ALbirds@groups.io.

Geoff Hill thanked Eric Soehren for taking over *Alabama BirdLife*, but stated Eric would need specific software that would cost approximately \$500 yearly. Ken Hare moved AOS provide the money for whatever is needed, with other options being explored for a better price. Anne Miller seconded and the motion was approved.

Eric Soehren stated SORA (Searchable Ornithological Research Archive) needs a platform for the AOS journal. Geoff suggested we also pay a student to provide this service. After more discussion Larry Gardella moved AOS pay a student to

convert print information to digital. Ken Hare seconded and the motion was approved.

Geoff reported there is no clean membership list. He suggested that we have one email list printed with all problem emails highlighted available at the registration desk at the Spring meeting (later broadened to every meeting). Each person will be asked at registration to update their email as well as others they are aware of.

Anne Miller suggested students be encouraged to participate, and Ken Hare suggested a student rate be considered as well as getting a qualified student on the Board. Bob Reed moved AOS establish registration and meal rates at one-half the normal rate for students with student ID. Anne Miller seconded and the motion was approved.

Geoff mentioned having an overnight trip for a winter meeting, or an out-of-state trip to meet a guide. Great interest was expressed for an AOS-sponsored trip to an out-of-state birding location noting AOS has an in-house guide. The 2021 winter meeting is tentatively set for Guntersville State Park.

OTHER BUSINESS

Greg Harber stated there is only one submission for the Dan Holliman award. Hannah Wright proposed to study, "Quantifying Chemical Preservatives in Red-headed Woodpeckers Relative to Utility Infrastructure." The total amount requested is \$1,290. Ken Hare moved to fund the full amount, and Ms. Wright be strongly requested to make a presentation at an AOS meeting or provide a written report of her findings to be published in *The Yellowhammer* or *Alabama BirdLife*. Anne Miller seconded and the motion was approved.

Greg Harber reported on legislation. He has sent a letter for AOS in support of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 3742). He has also sent a letter in support of the Migratory Bird Protection Act (H.R. 5552) to restore longstanding protections for migratory birds, which has been weakened significantly by the current administration.

Geoff Hill introduced member-guest Lew Scharpf, who provided information on the Kreher Preserve and Nature Center. He spoke of specific programs including the Purple Martin Project, Bluebird Boxes and Streaming Eagle Cam. Geoff Hill stated AOS would like to have all Center information on the AOS web site.

Kathryn Palmore reported the spring meeting is scheduled for the Shelby Center. The Friday night cost for the catered social will be \$20 per person (later changed) and the Saturday banquet will cost \$25 per person.

Andrew Haffenden emailed his report on spring field trips. Friday trips: Fort Morgan with banding and then on to Splinter Hill. Saturday trips: Pelican Island and around Dauphin Island. Sunday: Blakely.

Steve McConnell emailed his Alabama Bird Records Committee report, which stated 25 record reviews were completed, 18 reaching decision. Black-capped Petrel was accepted to the list based on four inland rehab birds in four different counties following Hurricane Irma. American Flamingo and Harris' Hawk both will go to a second voting. Three committee members rolled off the voting rolls. The ARBC will meet late in February, and these positions will be filled.

Shirley Farrell's email report stated Flying Wild Guides had been purchased for two workshops, and a third workshop will be held in the spring. Also, five boxes of books from Mary Porter's estate will be sold at the Spring Silent Auction. Once again AOS will support the Alabama Green Ribbon Schools as soon as the winning schools are announced.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

New, Improved ALbirds Site Now Working

FOR YEARS, THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY HAS sponsored ALbirds, an email-based Yahoo discussion group for birders who want to share information on rare wild bird sightings and birding-related issues, such as conservation, field trips, etc. But Yahoo has stopped supporting many of the features that made ALbirds work. So AOS is moving the ALbirds Group to a new home—at groups.io.

It's easy. Use the email account you wish to have ALbirds messages sent to and send a message to: ALbirds+subscribe@groups.io. Or you can visit the ALbirds website at groups.

io and subscribe there. The home page address is: <https://groups.io/g/ALbirds>.

The groups.io system offers features that weren't available to the Yahoo group. When you visit the website, be sure to create an account so you can enjoy all the features. Many of the most active ALbirds posters are already sending messages to the new group. All messages are saved on the website, so check out what you've been missing.

To make sure that the years of information on the old site—much of it containing valuable historical background on bird sightings in Alabama—is not lost, that data has been captured and AOS members are working on getting it available in a searchable format that can be accessed via the Internet. Stay tuned for updates on when that will be available.

In the meantime, make sure you sign up for the new ALbirds to stay in touch with birding issues around the state. And help us spread the word to the birding community.

Geoff Hill encourages us to use both ALbirds *and* eBird, as they reach different audiences.

Remember, you do not have to be a member of AOS to participate in ALbirds. It is a service that AOS provides free to all interested birders.

—Ken Hare

2020 Membership Dues

A FRIENDLY REMINDER ABOUT DUES. PLEASE CHECK YOUR membership date on your *Yellowhammer* to make sure that you are still current, or, particularly if you receive an electronic *Yellowhammer*, you can get in touch with me at lfgardella@gmail.com. AOS dues are by calendar year, and renewals were due in January. If you haven't paid your AOS dues for 2020, please do so now. We don't want to lose you. You can pay online at www.aosbirds.org, or you can send a check to AOS treasurer, Joan Dixon, 1059 Palmetto Street, Mobile, AL 36604.

Last year we had a membership contest with a prize of a private birding trip guided by an experienced AOS birder. If you have an idea for a different type of membership contest—or any other ideas for growing the membership, I would love to hear them. As you think about it, please remember to ask your friends to join.

—Larry Gardella, Membership Chairman

Leucistic Bird Observations in Opelika

ALTHOUGH I HAD READ ABOUT leucism in birds, I had never observed it. Then in mid-September several years ago, a friend and fellow birder in Opelika called to say that he had seen a very large white moth near his home and thought I might like to see it. Being involved with the Moth Photographer's Society of North America, I quickly grabbed my camera and headed for Roger Johnson's house. The "moth" was there and upon closer look, both of us realized that we were observing a hummingbird with very abnormal coloration. In fact, the bird was totally white except for a few small blotches of light gray color (photo below left). We called our friend and master hummingbird bander Fred Bassett in Montgomery, who promptly joined us with hopes to band, analyze, and release the bird. Unfortunately, the bird didn't cooperate and Fred was unable to catch it. However, the use of our binoculars and cameras allowed Fred to determine that the bird was an immature leucistic Ruby-throated Hummingbird, possibly a female. The bird stayed in the area for several days providing me ample



opportunity to obtain photos as it flitted around, feeding on Spotted Touch-me-not (Jewelweed) flowers.

Leucism is a condition in which birds have an abnormally low amount of pigment in their feathers. Birds exhibiting leucism may have pale colors over their entire bodies as exhibited by this hummingbird, which appears mostly white in color. Leucism may also take the form of random patches of white. Such birds are often referred to as "pied." Leucism typically targets one type of pigment—for instance only black eumelanin or only brown pheomelanin. In the leucistic Ruby-throated Hummingbird, the loss of eumelanin resulted in a loss of green and dark pigmentation, but the pale brown eumelanin of feathers remains. The skin and eyes of the leucistic Ruby-throated Hummingbird retained their normal eumelanin coloration indicating that the color loss was confined to feathers.

Leucism is sometimes confused with albinism. Albino birds are entirely white with pink eyes and skin. This color pattern occurs when the pigment melanin is completely absent from all tissues in the body. Leucistic birds are seen



much more often than albino birds, likely because total loss of pigmentation creates serious health problems for birds.

About a year ago, I observed a female Northern Cardinal that exhibited another type of leucism resulting in white blotches randomly scattered around her body (photo below right, opposite page). This “pied” cardinal was found on private property in early January of 2019, again in Opelika, Alabama. The bird was frequently seen at seed feeders on the property, often in the company of other cardinals of normal coloration. This bird seemed to be lacking both melanin and carotenoid pigments from individual feathers, so the source of this color aberration was probably very different than the source of the hummingbird color loss.

Some of the birds difficult to identify are those that have abnormal feather coloration and those in which the abnormality has removed key field marks. Leucism may appear anytime and in any species. These variations aren’t typically posted in field guides, so keep on the look-out and report birds that have washed out, whitish or white patch colorations. Your data will help to provide a clearer understanding as to how these variants fit into our ecosystem.

*2020 AOS Winter Meeting Compilation List
Dauphin Island, Alabama, January 24–26*

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE WEEKEND WERE ONE LESSER Yellowlegs and two Tree Swallows, both rare for January. Total count for the meeting was 102 Species.

- Canada Goose
- Wood Duck
- Blue-winged Teal
- Northern Shoveler
- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Mallard
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck
- Lesser Scaup
- Bufflehead
- Common Goldeneye
- Hooded Merganser
- Ruddy Duck
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Horned Grebe
- Rock Pigeon
- Eurasian Collared-Dove

- Common Ground-Dove
- Mourning Dove
- Common Gallinule
- American Coot
- Killdeer
- Greater Yellowlegs
- Lesser Yellowlegs
- Least Sandpiper
- Bonaparte’s Gull
- Ring-billed Gull
- Forster’s Tern
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Anhinga
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Black Vulture
- Turkey Vulture
- Osprey

- Bald Eagle
- Northern Harrier
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper’s Hawk
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Great Horned Owl
- Belted Kingfisher
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Red-cockaded Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Pileated Woodpecker
- American Kestrel
- Eastern Phoebe
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Blue-headed Vireo
- Blue Jay
- American Crow
- Fish Crow
- Tree Swallow
- Carolina Chickadee
- Tufted Titmouse
- Brown-headed Nuthatch
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Brown Creeper
- House Wren
- Winter Wren
- Sedge Wren
- Marsh Wren
- Carolina Wren
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Eastern Bluebird
- Hermit Thrush
- American Robin
- Brown Thrasher
- Northern Mockingbird
- European Starling
- American Pipit
- Cedar Waxwing
- House Sparrow

- House Finch
- American Goldfinch
- Eastern Towhee
- Bachman’s Sparrow
- Chipping Sparrow
- Field Sparrow
- Vesper Sparrow
- Savannah Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- Swamp Sparrow
- Fox Sparrow
- Dark-eyed Junco
- White-throated Sparrow
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Common Grackle
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Orange-crowned Warbler
- Common Yellowthroat
- Pine Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Northern Cardinal

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

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Summer 2020 May 10, 2020

Fall 2020 August 10, 2020

Winter 2020 November 10, 2020

AOS WINTER MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, APRIL 17-19, 2020

AOS Spring Meeting Schedule



UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL ACTIVITIES BEGIN OR occur at the Shelby Center, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, 101 Bienville Blvd., Dauphin Island, Alabama 36528. Casual attire throughout.

To register online for the Spring Meeting, go to:
<http://www.aosbirds.org>

FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 2020

- 6:30 a.m. Field Trip: Baldwin County**
Where: Green Park (next to Ship & Shore)
- 5:30 p.m.** Registration
- 5:00 p.m.** Silent Auction begins
- 6:00 p.m.** Social Hour, light hors d'oeuvres, DIBS cash bar (donations only for food and drink)
- 6:45 p.m.** Announcements
- 7:00 p.m.** Members Photography Show
- 8:00 p.m.** Discussion of Weekend Field Trips

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2020

- 6:45 a.m. Field Trip 1: Exploring Dauphin Island**
Where: Cadillac Square
- Field Trip 2: Birds of Pelican Bay Peninsula**
with Andrew Haffenden
Where: Public Beach and Pier parking lot
- 11:30 a.m.** Potluck Lunch at the home of Jennie Stowers
- 3:00 p.m.** Board Meeting at Shelby Center
- 5:15 p.m.** Registration at Shelby Center
- 5:30 p.m. BANQUET AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER**
Where: Shelby Center
- 5:30 p.m.** Social Hour
- 6:30 p.m.** Banquet
- 7:15 p.m.** Announcements
- 7:30 p.m.** Keynote Speaker: Noah Stryker
"Birding Without Borders"

SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2020

- 6:45 a.m. Field Trip: 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 Friday, April 17, 2020, to noon Sunday, April 19, 2020.) At the Goat Trees.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations on Dauphin Island are limited, so be sure to make reservations early for AOS Meetings.

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 2020 Spring Meeting Field Trips

ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST EMAIL ANDREW AT ANDREW@NATSP.COM to advise of your participation and with your cell phone number if you plan to attend any field trip so we know how many to expect on each trip, and so that any last minute changes can be sent to you. Due to the nature of some sites we may restrict the number of participants on a field trip. Please check the AOS website for updates.

Friday, April 17, 2020**BALDWIN COUNTY BIRDS AND BLOOMS**

Leader: Andrew Haffenden

Meeting Time: 6:30 a.m., depart 6:45 a.m. sharp.

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

Andrew Haffenden will share his birding skills as we visit sites in Baldwin County. We'll start by taking the ferry to Fort Morgan. After visiting the banding there we'll head to Splinter Hill Bog, among acres of pitcher plants and sundews. This bog is one of the largest White-topped Pitcher Plant bogs in America, with four other pitcher plant species also present as well as species of sundews. Our main birding goal, Bachman's Sparrow, should be singing from exposed perches. Other birds include woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatch, possibly Grasshopper Sparrow and others typical of Longleaf Pine habitat. Time permitting, we return to the coast and Meaher State Park to observe from the boardwalk on Mobile Bay. The park can hold a variety of birds including shorebirds, herons and egrets, gallinules, Gull-billed Terns, and occasionally Anhinga and Roseate Spoonbills. Alligators are also regular. Continuing along the Mobile Causeway, our next stop, again time permitting, (around 11:30-11:45) is a seafood restaurant on the Causeway, where we have views overlooking Mobile Bay while eating some of the best seafood in Alabama. After lunch we return to Dauphin Island, arriving by 3 p.m. in time for the incoming migrants.

Saturday, April 18, 2020**EXPLORING DAUPHIN ISLAND WITH NOAH STRYKER**

Trip Leader: TBA

Meeting Time: 6:45 a.m.

Meeting Place: Cadillac Square (large picnic park on Bienville)

We'll bird the varied habitats of Dauphin Island with keynote speaker Noah Stryker, starting at the airport for rails and sparrows, then to the Shell Mounds for warblers, vireos, tanagers and other migrants. We'll check out the Audubon Sanctuary and other island hotspots, aided by the cell-phone 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.

NOTE: It is important for all participants to meet at Cadillac Square, and not arrive at the airport independently. We need to carpool for this trip, and early airport arrivals can cause rails and sparrows to retreat into the marsh.

BIRDS OF PELICAN ISLAND PENINSULA

Trip Leader: Andrew Haffenden

Meeting Time: 6:45 a.m.

Meeting Place: Public Beach and Pier parking lot

Join Dauphin Island 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 to 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 identification 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 identification skills. As with the general Dauphin Island outing, we'll be back in time for the potluck lunch.

Sunday, April 19, 2020**FIELD TRIP TO BLAKELEY ISLAND MUD LAKES**

Trip Leader: TBA

Meeting Time: 6:45 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 and along the dikes 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 including Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Mississippi Kite and Northern Harrier are often seen. We'll return to Dauphin Island in time for compilation at noon. Parking is limited at this site so car-pooling is advised.

NOTE: A permit form must be lodged with the State Docks Authority prior to your arrival and the permit displayed inside the windscreen. Go to <http://www.aosbirds.org/alabama-birding/blakeley-island/> to register in advance. Registration is valid for the rest of the current year.

AOS SPRING MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, APRIL 17-19, 2020

Meet the Speaker: Noah Strycker

NOAH STRYCKER *just might be the world's most famous birder. Dubbed "the Birdman of Razzmatazz" by Newsweek and "the World's Greatest Birdwatcher" by The Independent newspaper in London, Noah set a Big Year world record in 2015 by identifying 6,042 bird species in a continuous around-the-world birding trip that took him to 41 countries and all seven continents.*

Noah grew up in the woods of western Oregon, coming to know the birds before he knew they had names. By the time he was in high school, he was contributing to national bird magazines. He was named the American Birding Association's Young Birder of the Year in 2004, and became associate editor of the ABA's flagship Birding magazine in 2006.

*After graduating with a degree in fisheries and wildlife from Oregon State University, Noah spent ten weeks with two other researchers on the ice at a remote field camp in Antarctica, studying Adélie Penguins. He turned that adventure into his first book, *Among Penguins*, published in 2011. Since then, he has published *The Thing With Feathers* (2014), *Birding Without Borders* (2017), *Birds of the Photo Ark* (2018), and the second edition of *National Geographic's Backyard Guide to the Birds of North America* (2019).*

Noah is currently a graduate student at Stony Brook University, where he is studying Chinstrap Penguins on the front lines of climate change in the Antarctic Peninsula area. He is also a popular speaker at birding events, and works as an on-board naturalist for expedition cruises to the Arctic and Antarctic, literally spreading the joy and inspiration of birds from pole to pole.

How to go Birding without Borders

By NOAH STRYCKER



BIRDING AROUND THE WORLD FOR 365 CONSECUTIVE days, as I did in 2015, you learn a few things about hard-core traveling. Here are my top tips for birding without borders.

1. Pack light. Really light. Everything I needed for that entire year I stashed in a carry-on backpack. I stripped life down

to bare essentials, Marie Kondo-like, and then jettisoned some more. I was almost never separated from that bag, and I had everything I wanted.

2. Trust strangers. If you don't have faith in people, life isn't very fun or interesting. I never could have pulled off my dream trip of a lifetime—or enjoyed it nearly as much—without putting myself in the hands of strangers around the globe. In every country I visited, I relied on people I had never met before. This is what birding is all about—people with a shared passion, sometimes from entirely different continents and maybe not even speaking the same language, meeting as strangers, joining in a common goal, and becoming the best of friends. I never once got burned.

3. Eat the local food. I've been addicted to street food since my parents took me to Oaxaca, Mexico, when I was three years old. The food in Oaxaca is exquisite. We all got sick. We all got over it. That was the beginning of my cast-iron stomach and zest for international cuisine.

4. Don't fret about money. If the problem can be solved by spending \$20, spend it. Actually, don't fret, period. At one point in central Peru, I was stranded on a remote mountaintop stuck in the mud in a ditch with a dead battery and two flat tires, and I had to be rescued by an Andean potato farmer named Rolando on the back of his dirt bike—but I saw a bird that morning called the Golden-backed Mountain Tanager that is super-endemic, and it is amazing how one bird can brighten up your whole day or even a whole week of misadventures.

5. Just go. The best use of your hard-earned money is to have experiences and make memories, not to buy stuff. It cost me about \$60,000 for my world Big Year, about the same as an SUV. On whatever budget you can afford, visit strange places, eat weird food, meet unusual people. Birding without borders brings us together and makes us realize that we all live on one awesome planet. Unlike objects, which rust, decay, and go out of fashion, the thrill of exploring our world of birds never tarnishes.

6. Keep your eyes on the skies. You never know what you might see when you keep looking up.

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Please check membership category: Student \$10 Individual \$25 Family \$40* Sustaining \$50
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Joan Dixon, 1059 Palmetto Street, Mobile, AL 36604

Name(s) _____

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Email address _____ Phone _____

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PLEASE ADD 3% TO PAYPAL TRANSACTIONS**

AOS SPRING MEETING 2020 REGISTRATION FORM

Complete and return to:

Joan Dixon, 1059 Palmetto Street, Mobile, AL 36604

Telephone: (251) 605-4276 • Email: joanwsdixon@gmail.com

Please make checks payable to AOS. Checks must be received by April 7, 2020

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

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TENNESSEE VALLEY AUDUBON

<http://www.tvas.org>