

# THE YELLOWHAMMER

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

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

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I AM RELUCTANT TO MAKE THE COVID-19 pandemic the focus of my president's essay. I think we are all sufficiently saturated by pandemic discussions. As the defining event of our lives (I don't think that we have any WWII veterans left in our group, and that might be the only event of the last 100 years that compares), however, the pandemic is impossible to ignore.

The pandemic has caused a nearly complete cessation of the activities of the Alabama Ornithological Society. This disruption came abruptly to the Alabama birding community as it did to society as a whole. The spring 2020 shutdown swept like a wave of falling dominos. Students left Auburn University, where I am a professor, for spring break with projects partly completed and with casual goodbyes to friends. Like much of society, Auburn University shut down in mid-March before anyone was able to come back from spring break. We all went to bed one night in the pre-pandemic world (I miss that world) and woke up the next day facing a rapidly spreading and potentially fatal virus with no certain endpoint and with many aspects of our lives disrupted.

From an AOS perspective, it is now hard to grasp that a large number of us gathered at Auburn University for our winter meeting in late January 2020, crowding together for our catered buffet banquet and cramming into a small lecture room to hear Dr. Scott Rush tell us about bird conservation efforts in Mississippi and Alabama. We shook hands, hugged, and stood close together to hear conversations in a crowded room. I think that we may never experience a meeting like that again—certainly handshakes and hugs and unnecessary close contact will not be so common. We'll think twice about getting too many people close together. This pandemic has truly changed our world.

For the first time in the history of our society, three successive in-person AOS meetings have been cancelled: Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Winter 2021. "In-person" is the key adjective here because the AOS Board has authorized the first virtual AOS meeting. During the same Friday and Satur-



day when we would have gotten together on Dauphin Island, all AOS members are now encouraged to attend activities via the web platform Zoom. On Friday evening, October 9, we will join together via video conference to socialize and say hello. After an hour of hanging out online, we'll let folks share a few slides of birds and trips or whatever they want to share. It won't be exactly like our Friday night socials at Dauphin Island, but I'm looking forward to it.

On Saturday evening, the AOS will host an on-line tern identification workshop presented by our own Andrew Haffenden. This workshop will be followed by a presentation by our invited speaker, the noted writer, speaker, storyteller and humorist Al Batt. It won't be the same as

getting together under the brilliant October sun and marching across white sand in quest of migrants, but it does have some advantages. Members who are too busy or otherwise could not have made the long drive to Dauphin Island will now have an opportunity to say hello to friends and hear the workshop and "banquet" talk. It will certainly be the greenest meeting in the history of the AOS.

The AOS will also host a "birding near home" event. AOS members are encouraged to turn in a checklist from a local birding site made during the week of the virtual fall meeting. We'll compile the checklists like we would compile bird sightings from Dauphin Island. Birding is not restricted to Alabama or even North America. Members who are overseas are welcome to submit a more exotic checklist. We'll compile both an Alabama and total bird list. In addition, participants are welcome to pledge a donation to a charity based on number of birds tallied. (The AOS Board is suggesting Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary (DIBS)).

To my knowledge and great relief, no AOS members have contracted the novel coronavirus. By conducting all AOS activities via the internet and discouraging long-distance travel for birding, we are doing our part to keep our members as safe as possible. Let's all get through this pandemic so we can be back to our meetings on Dauphin Island as soon as safely possible.



## DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL DISASTER

## *Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Coastal Bird Restoration Update*



IN DECEMBER 2019 THE ALABAMA TRUSTEE IMPLEMENTATION Group approved its third Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment to address natural resource injuries from the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) Oil Spill. Two projects from that slate of projects are focused on restoring birds along the Alabama coast.

The Alabama Coastal Bird Stewardship Program conserves priority shorebird and coastal waterbird populations by conducting bird stewardship, monitoring, and outreach in coastal Alabama, where beaches, marshes and islands provide critical nesting, wintering, and migratory stopover habitat for many species of shorebirds and coastal waterbirds.

The first three years of this program were funded through Alabama's portion of Clean Water Act fines administered through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund. This phase of the project marks a transition to a different stream of oil spill funding.

The program consists of five components that work together to reduce stressors that affect coastal bird populations and to provide information in support of future restoration decision-making:

- Conduct stewardship activities to reduce human disturbances that contribute to nest failure.
- Conduct targeted, coordinated predator management activities.
- Conduct monitoring in support of adaptive management at project sites to determine nesting and fledging success.
- Deploy decoys. Species-specific decoys would be deployed to attract target bird species to suitable nesting areas.
- Conduct habitat and nesting area enhancements.

The Alabama Coastal Bird Stewardship Project is a 3-year project and complements the work of similar initiatives in all Gulf of Mexico states.

The acquisition of Dauphin Island's West End entails acquiring approximately 838 acres of privately owned beach and dune habitat.

The western end of Dauphin Island encompasses a diversity of coastal habitats—sweeping dunes, salt marsh, and beach flats. Sea turtles and several bird species, including the federally listed Piping Plover use these habitats. The beach and dune areas serve as nesting habitat for the Least Tern and the Snowy Plover. Initial unpublished 2018 data from the Birmingham Audubon Society's Alabama Coastal Bird Stewardship Program and other bird surveys from the previous decade indicate that this property also provides foraging habitat for Wilson's Plover, Snowy Plover, Reddish Egret, American Oystercatcher, Least Tern, and other coastal bird species.

Public ownership of this large parcel would facilitate the protection and management of its habitats for the benefit of bird species injured by the DWH oil spill. Mobile County and the Town of Dauphin Island would develop a bird conservation and management plan in consultation with ADCNR and other entities.

In addition to the new restoration projects discussed above, Colonial Nesting Wading Bird Tracking and Habitat Use Assessment in Alabama is underway. The purpose of this \$1.5 million telemetry project is to collect information on wading bird ranges, movements and other important aspects of habitat use for future planning to restore wading bird species in Alabama injured by the DWH oil spill.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service field biologists are surveying three important coastal breeding areas—Mississippi Sound, Gaillard Island, and Perdido Bay.

So far, the biologists have surveyed two islands that have several wading bird nesting groups. On Isle aux Herbes (Coffee Island) in Mississippi Sound, there are four nesting groups containing large dense colonies of mostly White Ibises, Tricolored Herons, Snowy, and Cattle Egrets. The crews were able to capture more than 20 birds (halfway to the project goal of 40 birds) without disturbing the nest groups.

On Gaillard Island, they found thousands of nesting Brown Pelicans and Laughing Gulls. Seabirds are particularly sensitive to disturbances, so the field crew only captured

birds close to their boat landing location. Field staff captured and placed transmitters on several White Ibises and Tricolored Herons and continues collecting biological data and banding birds, even when a transmitter is not applied.

ADCNR is extremely pleased with the bird restoration projects planned and implemented in coastal Alabama to date. As planning and project selection continue for upcoming rounds of funding, we feel that our state is well positioned to obtain and implement projects funded not just

from Alabama's designated restoration funds, but also from available region-wide funds. ADCNR continues to work for funding to benefit birds in coastal Alabama.

For more information on these projects and more restoration in coastal Alabama please visit <https://www.alabama-coastalrestoration.org/>.

Questions about restoration in Alabama may be directed to DCNR's Deepwater Horizon Restoration Coordinator, Dr. Amy Hunter ([amy.hunter@dcnr.alabama.gov](mailto:amy.hunter@dcnr.alabama.gov)).

## AOS Membership Notes

By LARRY GARDELLA

**I**T IS EASIER TO GET PEOPLE TO JOIN AOS WHEN WE are meeting on Dauphin Island or running into other birders out in the field. But even when we are not meeting in person, AOS offers so much. The virtual fall meeting will include an expert speaker and a tern identification presentation. If you have not done so yet, please renew your AOS membership. And please talk to your friends about joining.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 had an immense effect on birding in Alabama and across the world. It has caused AOS to cancel its spring and fall meetings, and it has kept many birders from going out to enjoy birds. Many key birding sites were closed for most of migration, including most of Fort Morgan State Historical Park and the best shorebird site on Dauphin Island, Pelican Island. Alabama issued a "shelter-in-place" edict in early April, but as with most across the country, it included an express exception for hiking in nature with social distancing. Many birders took it to authorize anything other than stationary birding away from home or driving hours to bird, but most birders did a lot less birding in spring 2020.

Although there was still much messaging about staying home to avoid spreading the disease, the shelter-in-place edict ended, and most birding sites opened. The spring weather was good for seeing birds in much of the state. Tropical Storm Cristobal in early June brought Brown Booby, Parasitic Jaeger, Sooty and Bridled Terns, and Brown Noddy to coastal Alabama. Then in July, a mega-rarity appeared in Gulf Shores: the first South Polar Skua for the northern

Gulf Coast. There will be an article next year about the birds of Cristobal, late migrants as well as the pelagics, and I expect an article on the skua.

Since early March I have not left Lower Alabama. I sent regrets for a relative's wedding in Wisconsin in early August, still not ready to get on an airplane. In light of the threat of the pandemic, I have been playing it safe. But just about every morning I have gone out and looked for birds, mainly at the wonderful park a mile from my house, but also at such places as Blakeley Historic Park, Upper Delta WMA, Mud Lakes, Chickasaw Ponds, Fort Morgan, and Dauphin Island. And I have seen the booby, those three terns, and the skua. Most of the time, social distancing is easy, as there are few other people around. I am particularly careful when encountering others on boardwalks. And when I travel an hour, I try to be especially considerate to the local people who have chosen to bird only very close to home.

### Upcoming Meetings

**FALL MEETING**—October 10-11, 2020  
Virtual Meeting

**WINTER MEETING**—January 22-24, 2021  
Virtual Meeting

**SPRING MEETING**—April 15-17, 2021  
Dauphin Island, Alabama (tentative)

# Himalayan Snowcock—Not as Hard as Legend Suggests

**I**N THE MOVIE *THE BIG YEAR*, the Himalayan Snowcock is discussed as if it is an essentially impossible ABA bird. One of the main characters in the movie has to resort to chartering a helicopter to penetrate the mountain wilderness and, against all odds, he gets snowcock on his big year list. Although the movie hyped the situation beyond my previous thinking, I had always thought that Himalayan Snowcock was not a realistic ABA bird to chase. Since I had first started birding, I'd seen it pictured in my field guides, listed as restricted to the Ruby Mountains of Nevada, which sounded remote and mysterious. I never thought that I would have a chance to see one. But a couple of years ago, for the first time, I looked at the species detection map for Snowcock on eBird, and there were actually a lot of pins for the bird in the Ruby Mountains. Regular birders were seeing snowcocks every year, and they were not resorting to chartering helicopters. It was clear that the place to search was the Island Lake Trail at the end of Lamoille Scenic Byway—the main paved road up into the Ruby Mountains. In 2019 I started planning a 2020 trip to see Himalayan Snowcock.

It wasn't only a quest to see Himalayan Snowcock that drew me to Nevada. It would be my 50th state. I had plane tickets purchased for my wife and me, and we were all set to fly out for a four-day visit to Nevada in June when the great 2020 pandemic slammed down on us. Planes were still flying, but we didn't want to risk our health for a non-essential trip. I still wanted to get out to Nevada, so I decided to just drive over. I figured that I could make it there and back with 12 eight-hour days of driving. There were no between-state travel restrictions, gas was cheaper than it had been in 30 years, and I planned to just stay away from everyone. I arrived



at the Thomas Canyon Campgrounds at the base of the Ruby Mountains, Nevada, on June 15, 2020, and got ready for my hike to see Himalayan Snowcock the next morning.

I read on a couple of blogs that serious birders who really wanted to add snowcock to their lists start hiking the Island Lake Trail an hour or more before sunrise to be up to the lake in snowcock habitat for the first hour of light. Fortunately, I was smart enough to reconnoiter the route before I tried to launch out on a hike in the dark the next morning. The start to the Island Lake Trail is not easy to find. The trailhead is marked by an obscure, very small one-foot-square

wooden sign that is almost on the ground at the start of the trail. I would have had a heck of a time finding this trail in the dark at 4 a.m. I would highly recommend to anyone who intends to do this hike to find the trailhead in daylight.

It rained most of the night before I did my hike, and I was worried that the rain might have adversely affected trail conditions. It turned out it didn't matter. The trail was great. Also, the winter and spring of 2020 had been a heavy and late snow year in the mountains of Nevada, and I was worried that on my hiking date—June 16—there might still be snow on the trail. There wasn't. It is an easy hike. The only thing at all difficult about the hike is that it goes up the whole time. Going from the parking lot to Island Lake is sort of like climbing stairs for an hour. You have to have a bit of physical fitness, but you can go as slowly as you want. I'm 59 years old and in moderate shape, and I made it in less than 1 hour without feeling like I was exhausted. So, although you cannot drive to snowcock habitat, it is not all that tough to walk to it.

The rain did not affect the trail, but the unsettled weather did affect my snowcock search. The Island Lake Trail comes up over the lip of the caldera that holds Island Lake, and Hi-





*The Himalayan Snowcock was introduced to Nevada's Ruby Mountains from Asia in the 1960s. (J.G. Keulemans, 1891)*

malayan Snowcock habitat is laid out before you. There is a sign at the spot where you first overlook the lake that has information about both mountain goats and Himalayan Snowcock (which are both introduced species). The view from the sign is okay but you are still in some trees, so I crossed a small stream moving to the right of the snowcock sign and set up with a clear view of the lake and surrounding talus slopes. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't great when I arrived and got steadily worse over the next hour. The basin that contained Island Lake was socked in with clouds, and during the hour I hung around the area the clouds crept down the slopes and eventually enveloped me. The temperature was in the upper 30s, there was a steady 20 mile per hour wind, and just when I arrived and started to get set up, sleet pellets started hammering me. I think I could have picked a better morning. Despite all of those distractions, I started hearing Himalayan Snowcocks as soon as I settled down.

My iBird Pro app on my cell phone has two sounds for Himalayan Snowcock: what iBird calls a "rally call" and a call that to me sounds vaguely like an elk bugle. If you think elk bugle, you'll recognize that second call immediately. The bugle call was the most common. I heard about four or five bugles for every rally call. I ended up hearing a lot of calls from about 5:45 to 6:15 a.m. with a peak around 6 a.m.—more than 20 times I heard Himalayan Snowcock call. If the weather had been decent, I'm sure I could have spotted birds in my scope or even through my binoculars. As it was, I hardly used my scope. Between the gusty wind and my shivering it was not very useful. I mostly scanned with binoculars, and I got one view of a flying snowcock (big gallinaceous bird that wasn't likely to be anything else). I had planned to spend the whole morning, maybe four hours, up in the high country, but I left after one hour as clouds descended and the weather deteriorated. I had hoped for a photo but that was not to be. I did make a sound recording that I posted with my checklist on eBird.

A few takeaways from my snowcock experience: based on limited information most people go after snowcock from mid-July to the end of August. Almost none of the lists on eBird are from mid-June or earlier. Admittedly, I did run into bad weather, but I do not think you are any safer weather-wise in July or August versus June. I've never heard anyone report hearing Himalayan Snowcock as easily or hearing as many calls as I did in one hour (and the weather conditions were terrible). So, I think mid- or even early June might be a good time to go after the birds if you want to make sure that you at least hear one, assuming that they consistently call earlier in the breeding season.

My second key point is that it is not very hard to get to these birds. The road to the trailhead is an excellent paved road. The trail to Island Lake is like strolling along a sidewalk (not quite, the ground is a little bit uneven, but it is not hard hiking). This is actually a fun ABA bird to go after, and I would encourage anyone who likes birding adventures to try for it. Compared to going after Colima Warbler in the Big Bend National Park, a Himalayan Snowcock quest is about half as difficult, in my opinion.

## IN MEMORIAM

# Random Recollections of Birdwatching with Dick Reynolds

By HARRY DEAN

**I**FIRST MET DICK AND LINDA REYNOLDS SOMETIME IN the early 1990s. I was a novice birdwatcher on one of my first field trips with the North Alabama Birdwatcher's Society. We quickly became good birding friends and went on many field trips over the years. A year or so after we met, he mentioned something called AOS to me. Now I didn't know what AOS was but he assured me that I would have a great time—besides it was at Dauphin Island. He described all the “fallouts” where the birds were literally landing in the roads and you had to be careful not to run over them. He really made it sound great so I decided to give it a try the next spring. Well, there wasn't a fallout the first time I went but, for me, the birds were great. However it seemed like the bird numbers decreased each successive year. Dick jokingly (I think) pointed out each year that the decline happened after I started coming so I must be the cause. At my first AOS meeting, Dick and Linda introduced me to just about everyone and made sure that I felt part of the group. At the meetings, I could usually count on an invitation for dinner. After one of Linda's great shrimp feasts, I remember how Dick would always have his Blue Bell vanilla ice cream while we talked of the birds seen that day, the tide tables, and the plan for tomorrow.

His great sense of humor was always on display. Anyone who spent any time with Dick surely heard one of his stories about the old days. Probably the “Bluebird” story was the most famous, and I think I heard it just about any time we saw a bluebird. I am sure some of you have your own “Dick” stories.

There was no doubt that Dick was a good birder. I was always impressed with his ability to find and identify birds, especially since he had told me that he could not hear them and was also colorblind. I learned to look at the size, shape, behavior, etc. instead of just relying on color or call. He was also well known for finding good birds when he had to go

step behind a tree. You could just about count on him to come back with a Kentucky or Hooded Warbler. Linda told me about an incident that occurred on a bird count in the state park. Dick's disease had progressed to the point where he was using a walker to get around. While trying to cross a small ditch, he took a tumble and ended up on his back looking up at the sky just as three Anhingas flew over!

I never figured Dick for a lister as I had never seen him write anything down. I was surprised when he showed me his local field card and his year list using the AOS field card. I started a year list on the AOS card and we had an unofficial contest for the most species in a year (this was well before eBird was what it is today). Dick always managed to beat me by 15-20 species.

One thing is for sure, birdwatching with Dick was always a fun and interesting experience. I think I learned something every time we went out. Even though he wasn't able to get out for the last several years, I still remember our trips and all the good birds we saw. He was a great friend and mentor. I will miss him.

Excerpt from Dick's obituary:

*[Dick] was a scuba diver, bicyclist, hiker, runner, swimmer, and tennis player. He climbed Mt. Whitney at the age of 57 on one of his many business trips to California. He volunteered for many years at the Lake Guntersville State Park. He laid out the Tom Beville trail, led field trips for Eagle Weekends, and led the effort to refurbish the Cutchenmine Trail in the 1970s. He was a lifelong learner, becoming an authority on birds and wildflowers, and was pursuing a degree in Biology prior to contracting Parkinson's.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: *I have deep respect for Linda for making sure Dick had the opportunity to do everything he was capable of doing, even birding from the car seat.*



## IN MEMORIAM

# A Tribute to an Anonymous Famous Birder

By BALA CHENNUPATI

**J**ON EDWARD AHLQUIST WAS BORN ON JUNE 27, 1944. He was an extraordinary student, graduating high school as a valedictorian. He wanted to major in art but his father convinced him of the difficulties in making ends meet with an art major. So he chose his next passion: science and birds, and attended Cornell University to get his BS in Biology in 1966. In 1969, he received his Masters Degree in Biology, and in 1974 he received his PhD in Biology from Yale University. He has written and co-written many published articles on birds. Mr. Ahlquist was a co-recipient of the Daniel Giraud Elliot Medal from the U.S. National Academy of Science for his work in bird DNA in 1988. He retired as a Biology professor from Yale University. He travelled widely throughout the world and collected field data and bird specimens for his experiments.

During his tenure at Yale, along with his colleague Charles Sibley (not related to David Sibley), he proposed the revolutionary, for its time, Sibley-Ahlquist taxonomy. Sibley and Ahlquist's *Phylogeny and Classification of Birds* (1990) was a landmark work on the classification of birds, although it has been frequently debated and constantly revised. The classification of birds has always been a contentious issue, and has been in constant flux ever since the great Swedish naturalist physician Carl Linnaeus proposed the binomial Linnean taxonomy in his seminal work, *Systema Naturae*.

I first met Jon in Huntsville in 2009 when I was still learning about birds. I consider him one of my early mentors along with several others in North Alabama. He was an amazing birder equally skilled in identification by song and sight. As a birder who grew up at a time when optics were subpar and eBird top birder rankings were nonexistent, he had to use all his senses in identification and keenly observe bird behavior. Any time I had a new bird or a difficult ID problem, I would email him a picture, and he would imme-

diately respond with a large amount of information with lots of details. My contribution was to help him with more esoteric subjects like F-stop, aperture, and exposure. He became interested in photography late but for a different reason. He wanted to take pictures so he could use them as templates to sketch birds and paint. His paintings were displayed at the Lowe Mill Arts center in Huntsville where the Huntsville Arts League would sponsor several artists. He was a superb bird artist and painter on par with several of the master painters. He was a perfect blend of science and art.

I was always impressed with his kindness and ready-to-help attitude. He kept a low profile in Huntsville, and I tried to convince him to attend the Alabama Ornithological Society meetings and maybe even give a lecture. I regret that I did not pursue this further and make it happen. He was very knowledgeable and equally at home discussing a variety of subjects including art, opera, religion and philosophy. During the later years, his physical health declined and was forced to give up his walking and travelling but his mental faculties remained quite sharp. Jon was an active member of the Calvary Bible Church. He taught and often lectured classes of all ages in Sunday school with enthusiastic presentations of the Lord's handiwork in birds.

Jon passed away Thursday, May 7, 2020, in Huntsville at the age of 75. I attended his Celebration of Life held at the Calvary Bible Church. I was amazed that each and every speaker had a bird anecdote to share about him. The entire congregation sang his favorite song, "His Eye Is on The Sparrow" to honor him. I cherish the time I spent with him, and I have many fond memories of the several conversations I had with him. The world of ornithology is in a better place because of Jon Ahlquist. While his death will certainly leave a void, his legacy lives on through the many lives he touched, the graduate students he trained as a professor, and the high school kids he taught in Sunday school.

# The Quarantined Rare Bird of Auburn University

By BARRY FLEMING



OS PRESIDENT GEOFF HILL FOUND A SUPER RARE bird, the Great White Heron, at the water feature of the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art on April 4, 2020, the day of the governor's shelter-in-place order. The magnificent bird has been sheltering in place ever since.

The largest North American heron, Great White Heron, *Ardea herodias occidentalis*, is currently at the center of a renewed national scientific debate. Should it receive full species status or be relegated as a subspecies or a color-morph of the Great Blue Heron, the common, tall gray bird often referred to as "crane" that graces every farm pond to major reservoir in the state of Alabama?

This very summer the American Ornithological Society Classification Committee is entertaining a proposal to split the Great Blue Heron and add a new species to the bird world, the Great White Heron. Actually, it would be adding it back. The bird was considered a separate species for over a hundred years until 1973 when it was lumped with Great Blue Heron. The argument was, "it's just a color morph." So, for almost fifty years, birders have been arguing over whether it is a color morph, a sub-species or a true species. Birders love to do that. "Lumpers gonna lump, splitters gonna split." There is new scientific data on the issue, and the decision is much awaited by the birding community.

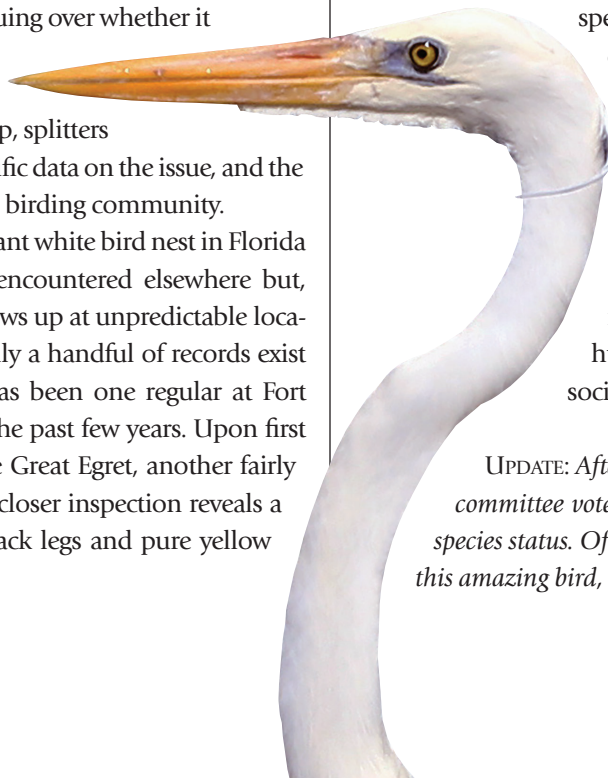
Eight hundred pairs of this giant white bird nest in Florida Bay and the Keys. It is rarely encountered elsewhere but, every once in a while, a bird shows up at unpredictable locations all the way to Canada. Only a handful of records exist for Alabama, although there has been one regular at Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island for the past few years. Upon first glance this bird is similar to the Great Egret, another fairly common bird in Alabama, but closer inspection reveals a larger bird without the bold black legs and pure yellow bill of the egret.

A distinguishing characteristic is the bill, an enormous, powerful, killing tool. Naturally, there are questions as to why the bird is here, what it is doing, when is it going to leave and where does it go then, back to the Keys? Only one question is answerable. It is eating. And eating and eating. I've seen it eat about every plump tadpole in the pond, then eat all the rest of the tadpoles that turned to frogs later. I've seen it eat a bluegill big enough for me to wish to eat the fish myself. John James Audubon noted one in captivity that ate voraciously, including chickens and ducks, "which it would tear up." It even went for the farm cat.

Our special guest hangs out most days on one of the two water features at the museum or across the street at the performing arts center. It has also been seen at the Ag Red Barn pond and Town Creek Park pond where it enjoys the abundant turtles. Some days it can't be found. One person swears he saw it first back in March standing on a roof on Gay Street. The big question is, who is going to see it last?

So, get a chance to see this bird as soon as you can, and one day when the committee determines its species status, sitting in your Lazy-boy chair, you may get to add a new species to your life list. Birders call that an "armchair tick." And, if you're not a ticker, come to the temporarily closed museum and performing arts center anyway and walk the beautiful grounds and check out the many outdoor sculptures among the hundreds of magnolia blooms, where social distancing is easy.

UPDATE: After the completion of this article the AOS committee voted to deny the Great White Heron full species status. Of course, that does not affect the rarity of this amazing bird, the sculptures, or the magnolia blooms.



SPECIAL CALLED MEETING VIA ZOOM, JULY 27, 2020

# Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By PAT REED, Secretary



HE SPRING MEETING WAS CANCELLED DUE TO THE COVID-19 pandemic, so no board or membership meeting was held. On July 27, 2020, AOS president Geoff Hill called a special board meeting to order at 1:00 p.m., via Zoom.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Geoff Hill stated the meeting had been called to decide how to move forward with the fall meeting. The board unanimously agreed meetings for October and January should be suspended because of the uncertainty of the pandemic.

Bob Reed suggested the possibility of some form of virtual meeting during the weekend of AOS. After a lengthy discussion, a committee composed of Geoff Hill, Barry Fleming, Shirley Farrell, and Andrew Haffenden will work out the details for a virtual meeting. When details are complete the virtual meeting information will be published in *The Yellowhammer* and posted on the AOS website.

Bob Reed stated that all articles for *The Yellowhammer* are due by August 15 and requested articles be submitted for use in the upcoming edition or in future editions.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Joan Dixon presented the report for January 1 through June 30, 2020. Total income was \$7,616.34 and expenses were \$9,033.05, leaving a net income of (\$1,416.71). AOS has \$20,375.10 in checking, a CD of \$29,050.06 that matures January 27, 2025, and restricted fund of \$14,613.29. A complete copy of the treasurer's report is attached to original minutes only.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

**RECORDS**—President Geoff Hill reported for this committee, stating the Summer Bird Count had excellent participation, and there are plans for invasive plants to be removed and native plants introduced at Fort Morgan.

**EDUCATION**—Shirley Farrell reported Flying Wild Workshops will continue.

AOS continues to support the Green Ribbon Schools program of Alabama and U.S. Departments of Education. The 2020 Alabama Green Ribbon schools are Morris Avenue Intermediate School in Opelika and Magnolia Nature School at Camp McDowell. The AOS Education Committee chairperson will deliver to each school a bluebird house, built by Don Self, and a certificate for free Flying WILD Bird curriculum guides and training for faculty.

Donation of books from the estate of Mary Porter will go into auction at the next face-to-face meeting.

AOS is a partner with Legacy for the virtual Mountains to the Gulf teacher workshop. This workshop is an 8-day trip throughout Alabama. The virtual version will take place over several days but teachers can stay at home. AOS will provide Flying WILD Bird Curriculum guides to participants and provide the training to use the guides.

**CONSERVATION**—Greg Harber reported the Great American Outdoor Act passed both houses of Congress and now awaits the President's signature, and he (Greg) continues to research the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which prohibits the taking of protected migratory birds without prior authorization.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

## Current Email Address Imperative For Virtual Meeting

THE VIRTUAL MEETING MAKES IT IMPERATIVE THAT WE HAVE a current email address for you. Notices will be sent out via email with links to meetings, etc. The only way to receive those notices is via email. Please send your current email address along with your name to Larry Gardella at [lfgardella@gmail.com](mailto:lfgardella@gmail.com).



AOS FALL VIRTUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 3-20, 2020

# AOS Fall Meeting Schedule



BECAUSE WE WILL HAVE NO AOS FIELD TRIPS this fall, AOS is sponsoring a "birding near home" event. Each AOS member is encouraged to submit one checklist from the period October 3 to October 9 and submit the checklist to Geoff Hill, AOS President (ghill@auburn.edu). Birding does not have to be in Alabama (or even in the US). Go out birding and create a checklist near where you are living. Geoff will compile an Alabama summary and if necessary a world summary and present the results at the Saturday evening virtual banquet.

The virtual meeting will save members a ton of money. No meals, or lodging, and much less gasoline. So the board is challenging everyone who is able to pledge a certain amount for each bird species you see or each individual bird you see. Then donate that money to a charity of your choice. We are strongly suggesting that the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary (DIBS), which is purchasing and thus preserving bird habitat on Dauphin Island, would be a most appropriate recipient, but of course that is up to you. Donating is not a requirement of participation.

The DIBS address is: Treasurer, Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc., PO Box 1295, Dauphin Island, AL 36528.

## October 3-9, 2020

### BIRD NEAR HOME

Share one checklist from a nearby birding spot with Geoff Hill (ghill@auburn.edu). We'll compile checklists and review highlights at the Saturday banquet.

## Friday October 9

### ON-LINE SOCIAL

5:30-6:30 p.m. Open forum social

6:30-8:00 p.m. Member slides

## Saturday October 10

### WORKSHOP, COMPILATION, AND SPEAKER

5:30-6:30 p.m. Workshop on Dauphin Island

Tern ID with Andrew Haffenden

6:30-6:50 p.m. Bird around home compilation/highlights

7:00-8:00 p.m. Speaker: Al Batt

## Tuesday, October 20

### AOS BOARD MEETING

9:00 a.m. Via Zoom

AOS FALL VIRTUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 3-20, 2020

# Meet the Speaker: Al Batt

AL BATT of Hartland, Minnesota, is a writer, speaker, storyteller and humorist. Al writes humor and nature columns for many newspapers and does regular radio shows about nature. He writes a number of popular cartoon strips that are syndicated nationally and is author of the book, *A Life Gone to the Birds*. He is a columnist for *Bird Watcher's Digest* and *Watching Backyard Birds*, and writes for a number of magazines and books. He is a trustee of the American Bald Eagle Foundation in Haines,

Alaska. Al hosted TV shows for many years and speaks at various festivals, conferences and conventions all over the world. He has received the Ed Franey Conservation Media Award from the Izaak Walton League, the Thomas Sadler Roberts Award from the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union for lifetime contributions to birding, and was recognized by *Bluebirds Across Nebraska* for outstanding contributions to wildlife conservation. Al speaks to anyone who will listen. His mother thinks he's a big deal.

# *The Case of the Lost Binoculars*

By AL BATT

**I**T WAS THE WAY I'D RUN OFF AND JOINED THE CIRCUS. I led birding trips. That was fun.

On the trip I write of, I had a grand group and contemplated the possibility of completed checklists and the sightings of a Carbonated Swamp-warbler and a Cuvier's Kinglet. Or maybe, be still my heart, a Washington Eagle. John James Audubon claimed to have seen those birds; maybe we'd spot them, too.

I know you think of a birder as the epitome of enlightenment. Maybe that's so, but men aren't perfect, even when they are birders. Men sometimes struggle admitting when they're wrong. "I made a mistake," isn't something that jumps eagerly from a man's lips. I'm not sure why that is. We've had plenty of practice in blundering. "Often mistaken, never in doubt," that's a man's motto.

In keeping with my glamorous lifestyle, the hotel I'd fixed us up with didn't offer a complimentary breakfast that had been figured into the room rate. We were up much too early for it, even if it had been available. We went down the road half-a-mile to an eatery. We enjoyed a fine meal with fine company. We were back on the road before dawn had awakened. One member of the group drove a Toyota Tercel. I thought a car named after a male falcon was a good sign. It was a long drive to our first stop. We had no target birds other than to see all the warblers we possibly could. We had carpooled to a small park that proved to have amazingly abundant avian activity. We witnessed the wonder of warblers in waves. There were so many warblers they echoed in various voices. You've heard that happen. Birders called out, "Golden-winged, Golden-winged, Golden-winged." "Blackburnian, Blackburnian, Blackburnian." The bird banders in the group created a "GWWA, GWWA, GWWA" echo. The Golden-winged Warbler echoed for a long time as another group joined us.

It was a bit better than perfect except for one thing. There's always a fly in the ointment. One of the women had forgotten her binoculars at breakfast. She had what we call "nice binoculars." I phoned the eatery, and they agreed to hold the dandy optics in safekeeping. I had an extra pair of binoculars

for her to use. They weren't as nifty as hers, but they had more experience. You'd have thought things would have been superb, right? Well, they weren't. Her husband, a sensitive and caring man, kept reminding her of her forgetfulness, in a teasing and nagging way. It wasn't incessant, but it was next door. They seemed to get along and to her credit, she smiled as I do when I'm working a particularly tough crossword puzzle when he razzed her. She knew her husband better than anyone.

We were at a second site to see a film, have a meal and get a tour of the facility before going on a bird walk. One of our party needed to go home. It was a family matter that needed tending to promptly. Like a leader should, I had a first aid kit, but it was of little help with such things. Bandaging works only on wounds and The Rolling Stones. She had been riding with me, so I agreed to take her to the hotel immediately if not sooner. I told the couple who had forgotten the binoculars (married couples should share everything) of my intent and hatched a plan. I'd drive the woman back to the hotel, pick up the other woman's binoculars at the restaurant on the return trip and be back in time for the walk. The woman with the lost binoculars could stay and eat. Bob's your uncle, life was good!

The plan was readily accepted, but the man kept picking at the scab, "It's good you do that instead of having my wife do it. If she went back to get them, she'd leave something else there and she'd have to go back again. Honestly, if her head wasn't permanently attached to her body, she'd have left it in that restaurant, which would have been OK. When you picked up her binoculars, they'd still be around her neck."

I wasn't all that unhappy to hit the road. I liked the man, but I'd grown weary hearing of his wife's severed head.

I'd just gotten behind the steering wheel when there was a knock on my window. It was the husband of the long-suffering woman with the lost binoculars.

I rolled down the window and he said, "I have a favor to ask of you. When you're picking up my wife's binoculars at that restaurant, could you grab my backpack, too?"

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### *New Members*

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Grace Simms  
 Jackson Smith  
 Stephanie Pluscht  
 Lois Chaplin  
 A. G. Smith  
 Bingham & Larry Gibbs  
 Molly Folkerts Caldwell  
 Margaret Blackmon  
 Terry Shaneyfelt  
 Annabel Stubbs  
 Paul & Dianna Porter

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### *Honoraria and Acknowledgements*

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*Scholarship Fund in memory of Dick Reynolds*  
 Lynne Hurley

*AOS in memory of Dick Reynolds*  
 Frank and Shirley Farrell

*AOS in memory of Dick Reynolds*  
 Kathleen M. Speir

*AOS in memory of Dick Reynolds*  
 Dean Cutten

*AOS in memory of Dick Reynolds*  
 Anonymous

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### *Alabama Backyard BioBlitz*

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**R**ESIDENTS FROM AROUND THE STATE JOINED WEEKS BAY National Estuarine Research Reserve in celebrating World Environment Day by participating in the Alabama Backyard BioBlitz on June 5. The event encouraged the public to explore and document with a photograph the natural world from the comfort of their own backyards by uploading observations onto iNaturalist. The inaugural

year of the event was a great success, drawing in 165 participants from around the state and recording over 2,100 observations. The person submitting the most observations (227) and the most species (195) was Bob Reed.

"The theme of this year's event was biodiversity," said Clara Zubrick, Weeks Bay Education Assistant. "Alabama ranks fifth in the nation in biodiversity and first east of the Mississippi River. To protect and conserve our environment, we must first connect with what's out there. The best place to begin exploring nature is in your own backyard."

Weeks Bay Reserve plans to make this an annual event as a way to increase awareness of the state's amazing biodiversity and celebrate its natural beauty.

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### *Have You Read a Good Bird Book Lately?*

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**I**F YOU HAVE READ A GOOD BIRD BOOK LATELY, PLEASE TELL US about it. It doesn't have to be about birds exclusively, but about conservation, nature in general, or other related topics. I'm not looking for a review, necessarily, but just recommendations of good books you've run across. Let the rest of us know, so we can read them too.

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### *Send In Your Stories!*

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**T**HE YELLOWHAMMER MUST BE PRINTED IN FOUR-PAGE increments. Thus we are always in need of your articles, of virtually any size, to make the pages come out right. If you have an article, story, or amusing incident about your birding adventures, trips, yard sightings, or just short vignettes that were interesting, different, or entertaining, please send it to the Editor. Electronic versions are much easier to copy and paste, but send them by snail mail or paper airplane if you need to. The addresses are on the back cover.

#### *Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions*

Winter 2020	November 10, 2020
Spring 2021	February 10, 2021
Summer 2021	May 10, 2021



## AOS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

*Your Membership Dues Support the Work of the Alabama Ornithological Society*

Please check membership category: ☐ New Member ☐ Renewing Member

Please check membership category: ☐ Student \$10 ☐ Individual \$25 ☐ Family \$40\* ☐ Sustaining \$50  
☐ Life (individual) \$350 ☐ Life (family\*) \$550 \*Number of family members \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Joan Dixon, 1059 Palmetto Street, Mobile, AL 36604**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**YOU CAN ALSO JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP ONLINE AT [WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG](http://WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG)  
PLEASE ADD 3% TO PAYPAL TRANSACTIONS**



Common Grackle by Greg Harber.  
Greg is the featured photographer  
this month on the AOS website  
(aosbirds.org). Check it out!

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EDITOR.....Bob Reed  
DESIGN.....Robin McDonald  
ILLUSTRATIONS.....Annabel Markle

### CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Greg Harber  
Geoff Hill  
Ken Hare  
Lew Scharpf

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Address correspondence concerning membership to:  
Joan Dixon, Treasurer  
1059 Palmetto Street,  
Mobile, AL 36604  
e-mail: joanwsdixon@gmail.com

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Life (family): \$550



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### MOBILE BAY AUDUBON SOCIETY

<http://www.mobilebayaudubon.org>

### ALABAMA WILDBIRD CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

<http://www.bamabirds.com>

### SOUTHEASTERN RAPTOR REHAB CENTER

<http://www.vetmed.auburn.edu/raptor>

### TENNESSEE VALLEY AUDUBON

<http://www.tvas.org>