

THE YELLOWHAMMER

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

FOUNDED 1952



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MEETINGS

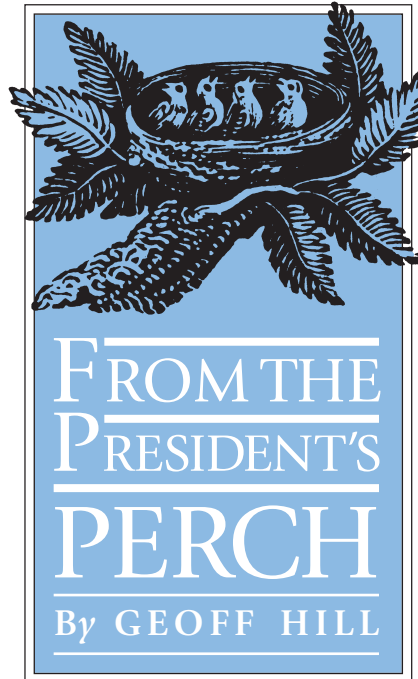
Kathryn Palmore
 Dana Timmons, Sue Timmons

What to Make of Three Billion Birds Lost?

A RECENT HEADLINE, FIRST appearing in a prestigious science journal and then cascading through world media proclaimed: "Three Billion Birds Lost." This sad estimation of the number of birds lost over a 48-year period (1970 to 2018) in the U.S. and Canada was made by a group of scientists analyzing count data from Breeding Bird Surveys. In follow-up interviews, I repeatedly read the responses from ornithologists and conservation biologists that included "crisis," "ecosystem collapse," and "shocking."

As a professional ornithologist who has worked extensively on conservation issues, I don't want to make light of the conclusions of this paper. Quantifying the loss of birds over the last five decades and drawing attention to declining bird populations is extremely important. The data analysis done by this team is sophisticated and appropriate, and I think their estimates are accurate. Nevertheless, I contend that the state of the birds in the U.S. and Canada might not be as dire as some headlines suggested.

Throughout nearly the entire 48-year period of the study, I've been looking at birds. I started birdwatching as an 11-year-old in 1971, so this loss of three billion birds transpired literally in front of my eyes. To be honest, my first response when I saw that 29% of individual birds had disappeared from the continental US and Canada was not "I can't believe how bad this is." Rather, my response was a more optimistic: "Wow, we still have 71% of the birds that we had in 1970." I'm not being facetious that the loss of 29% of individual birds in North America seemed to me more like good news than bad news. When I go back to Northern Kentucky, where I pursued birds as an adolescent in the early 1970s, the field where I watched Henslow's Sparrows sing and Black-billed Cuckoos coo is a parking lot for a regional hospital—not a lot of birds left in those acres. When I go to



visit my brother and his family, I drive to his house in a vast suburb that, when I was a teenage birder, was an extensive forest in a remote and hard-to-reach corner of the county. There are birds in this suburb, but only a fraction of what existed before it was developed. Where once there were pockets of development surrounded by woodland, there are now wooded parks and reserves amid an ocean of houses, highways, and strip malls. Through the last 25 years, I have watched the same transition unfold in Auburn, Alabama. And looking down from seats on commercial airliners over recent decades, I've watched the countryside of the entire eastern U.S. be swallowed by a more and more extensive urban blanket. It is not shocking to me that 29% of birds are no

longer with us when it seems that way more than 29% of the landscape has been swallowed up by development.

Despite this stark reality that we live in a world with 3 billion fewer birds than existed just a few decades ago, the news is not all bad. As a matter of fact, from the perspective of maintaining viable bird populations in the U.S. and Canada, the news is not terrible at all. There is currently not a single species of bird in the continental U.S. and Canada that is under imminent threat of extinction. All of the extremely rare species of birds in North America that were near the brink of extinction when I started birding in the 1970s, such as California Condor, Whooping Crane, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and Kirtland's Warbler, have growing populations. In my lifetime, we have lost no bird species in the continental US or Canada (note that the Dusky Seaside Sparrow was a subspecies and not a species), except perhaps Bachman's Warbler and that species was, for all intents and purposes, gone before I was born. I think it is counterproductive to talk in terms of a collapse of North American bird populations, as I have sometimes heard. It is clearly not true, and it may actually undercut conservation efforts.

I'm certainly not arguing that the situation for birds in North America is universally or even generally rosy. In the journal article that led to the numerous headlines about the shocking loss of birds, the authors parse out subgroups of birds by both taxonomy and habitat to see how various subgroups are faring. When grouped by habitat, grasslands birds have shown the greatest decline, with about half of all grassland birds gone since 1970. And this decline continues to the present. We get an inkling of this decline in grassland birds in Alabama with conspicuously fewer meadowlarks and bobwhite in Alabama than a few decades ago, but the problem is compounded across plains states where a majority of breeding birds are grassland species. Unlike some other conservation issues revealed by the data, however, this is potentially a fixable problem. The major grasslands in the Great Plains support a miniscule human population. The problem for grassland birds is not suburbs, strip malls, and roads; rather, birds are declining in the great plains because of increasingly intensive agriculture, sometimes on marginal farmland. The U.S. and Canada do not need the food resources produced on marginal farmland. Changes in policies and attitudes about land use, with large areas of marginal farmland set aside as prairie reserves, could realistically reverse the downward trend in grassland birds. The fact that wetland birds have significantly increased in the U.S. and Canada since 1970 shows the power of conservation groups, like Ducks Unlimited, to stimulate continental-scale changes in land use that can have huge positive effects on bird populations.

I advocate three basic messages in encouraging the conservation of birds. First, fight to maintain and expand legislation that protects endangered species, migratory birds, and clean air and water. It is no secret why no rare birds have gone extinct in the U.S. since 1970; the Endangered Species Act led to the preservation and management of the habitat that rare species needed to recover. Second, do your part to protect the bird habitat around you. Writing letters to stop drilling in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska is important and could impact the populations of birds that migrate through Alabama, but you will have a much stronger voice and potentially do more good for birds by fighting for habitat in your own city, county, and state. Third and finally, when friends and relatives ask about bird conservation, avoid a doomsday, all-is-lost message. A message of the hopelessness of trying to

save dwindling bird populations does not inspire citizens to support conservation initiatives. Instead, balance an explanation about what has been lost with the message that we have recovered disappearing species and that, with public support, we can maintain healthy populations of all bird species.

Birding Your Local Patch (for Charity)

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 January 16 to January 22 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. This is a pledge only for yourself; you do not need to tell anyone. Or you may wish to determine how much money you are saving and donate all or a portion 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. A donation is not a requirement of participation. The DIBS address is:

Treasurer,
Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc.
PO Box 1295,
Dauphin Island, AL 36528

DIBS Thank You

THE DAUPHIN ISLAND BIRD SANCTUARIES BOARD IS EXTREMELY grateful to the birding community for their financial support for the clean-up and restoration of DIBS properties on Dauphin Island following Hurricanes Sally and Zeta. Through the concerted efforts of AOS and the DIBS

online appeals to their memberships and "Birding Near Home" project, approximately 55 individuals/families have provided DIBS with over \$6,800 dedicated to the cleanup and remediation of devastated bird habitat on Dauphin Island. The monies have been used for extensive tree removal, opening of trails, and debris removal in the Shell Mounds, Goat Tree and Grant Street properties, and Sto's Woods at a cost of \$3,000.

Future work includes tree removal in the DIBS property at the entrance of the Audubon Sanctuary, repair to the fencing at the Goat Tree Reserve, further cleanup of DIBS properties,

and restorative native plantings projects. AOS has generously pledged an additional \$2,500, if needed, for further cleanup and restoration of bird habitat that has been depleted of critical resources. DIBS is in the process of assessing the best methods and costs of replacing and revitalizing habitat that would not recover for many years without our help. DIBS has established a goal of \$5,000 to continue this restoration project beyond the current pledges and donations. DIBS thanks AOS for supporting the recovery of precious habitat needed to sustain our resident and migratory birds! Please help us spread our message to the birding community.

AOS Annual Dues are Due January 1

By LARRY GARDELLA, *Membership Recruitment Committee Chair*



AOS HAS ADAPTED TO COVID. INSTEAD OF GETTING together for our spring and fall meetings, we have met over Zoom. After one session during the first meeting was Zoombombed, we have learned how to have a meeting that allows a good-sized group to enjoy each other's company, an interesting speaker and some great photographs. We have continued to bird, but mostly at or near our homes. Some of us have been surprised at just how good close-to-home birding can be.

Although the vast majority of my birding since COVID has been within a mile or so of our house, my "near home" extends from Daphne down to Fort Morgan, up to the Upper Delta and over to Mud Lakes and then Dauphin Island. I have not left Lower Alabama since early March, and I am on track to set personal records for species seen in a year for both Baldwin and Mobile Counties. With a bit of luck, I may reach 300 total species for the two counties this year.

The birding has been great! Consider a trip to Dauphin Island November 9. A pleasant walk out on Pelican Island that brought Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls interacting with Herring Gulls, a Red Knot walking among Short-billed Dowitchers, four species of plover and just the peaceful enjoyment of slowly approaching and then standing near the end of Pelican in the company of hundreds of gulls, terns and skimmers. It was still fairly early when I walked up the pier to head back to my car. When I reached the door one of the workers (Greg) opened it from the other side. After say-

ing "good timing," he said that he had just seen an owl that wasn't a Great Horned. He pointed out the way the owl had flown, and I was able to find it at the base of an evergreen, take its photo (through reeds and grass) and then carefully hand my binoculars over to Greg for a brief view. Since Drew has a long Dauphin Island list, and I wasn't sure Barn Owl was on it, I texted him. After I drove off to look for land birds, Drew texted back, and we met on the pier. The owl wasn't visible, but I led Drew toward the tree, and we watched the owl fly up. If we are lucky, the owl will stay on the island for some time, and many birders who are staying near home (and some who aren't) will be able to see it.

Social distancing makes it harder for us to meet new birders and invite them to join AOS. In this time of COVID I have recruited some birders I have met into AOS, but I recognize that I could do more to tell people who are delighted by birds about the benefits of joining. There are benefits now, and there will be further benefits as COVID restrictions ease some time next year. In the next four months, I will make an affirmative effort to talk about AOS to more of the many people I run into (at a distance) when out birding. And I ask that you all do the same. I will even ask Drew, who knows Greg from the Pelican Island workforce far better than I do, to ask him about joining.

Please remember that AOS dues are for calendar years, so by the time you get this, unless you are a life member or have paid in advance, your dues are due January 1, 2021. Let's leave 2020 in the dust by renewing your membership.

Rare Tropicbird in Opelika, Alabama

By LEW SCHARPF



ON OCTOBER 29, 2020, A VERY RARE Red-billed Tropicbird fell out of the sky in Opelika from the remnants of tropical storm Zeta.

Jeananne Allgood was leaving her office when she noticed what she initially thought was a piece of white paper fluttering down. Then she realized it was a bird that had “hit the ground with a thud.” Seeing that the bird was alive but exhausted, she placed it in a box and took it home. Unable to identify the bird and not knowing how to care for it, she contacted her friends for advice. Local birders Rodney McCollum and Lew Scharpf realized that the bird was a Red-billed Tropicbird, an unheard-of visitor to the area. James Holmes, an expert birder, confirmed the identification.

The bird is gull-sized, white with black barring on its back and black wingtips. It has an orange to red bill and a long tail with streamers that often take the form of a “V” when in flight. It is a graceful seabird that ranges widely in the tropical and subtropical areas of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and typically nests on rocky islands in tropical seas. In North American waters it has been found far off the coast of California, where it may be a rare but regular visitor more than 100 miles from land.

Tropicbirds spend most of their life flying over the open ocean, plunge-diving for fish and squid. It is rarely seen on land, and for good reason; it cannot stand upright or walk because its short legs are set too far back and its feet are paddle-shaped. It has to use its long wings to push itself forward on its belly.

Even though it wanders great distances away from its nesting islands, this is the first documented sighting of the species in inland Alabama according to Greg Jackson of the Alabama Bird Records Committee. There are two Red-billed records for off-shore, and two old “tropicbird species” records.

Attempts were made to feed and provide the bird with live minnows and water but it would not eat or drink. With the



A Red-billed Tropicbird (Phaethon aethereus) lies exhausted on the grass in Opelika, Alabama. Sadly, the bird died before it could be transported to a rehab facility. (Jeananne Allgood)

help of birder Jim Holmes, a wildlife rehabilitation organization in Mobile, Alabama, was contacted and agreed to receive the bird in the attempt to rejuvenate it.

Unfortunately the bird died before it could be transported to Mobile. The deceased bird was provided to Geoff Hill, who will place it in the Auburn University Museum of Natural History.

Given that this tropicbird is a highly sought-after species for birders’ life lists, its visit to Opelika was indeed a very special event, tempered by its death and the small number of people who got to enjoy it.

South Polar Skua Saga

By BOB DUNCAN

IT WAS A HUMID THURSDAY MORNING, JULY 30. LUCY checked email, and her shout declared something wild was afoot! Two birders, Sabrina Cobb and Olivia Morpeth, had photographed a South Polar Skua at the Gulf Shores Pavilion. Incredible, but convincing photos! We dropped everything, forgot lunch, and dashed over the state line as Lucy called Larry Gardella in Daphne, who got there first. And thus began the Skua Saga.

Larry had not found the bird by time we got there, and after searching, we left to explore westward along the Gulf. By that time it was mid-day—hot, humid, windless, with crowded beaches and overall misery, especially without the bird in our bins. Forty minutes later, and without finding the bird, we started back to the Pavilion when Larry phoned—he had it, and it was only two miles from us. But when we arrived, it was gone again! Lucy walked the beach east while Bob stayed on the elevated boardwalk. After she was way out of shoutin' distance, the bird suddenly appeared in front of Bob over the beach. *Life skua for Bob!* But it was passing *behind* Lucy who was looking offshore at feeding terns. Bob shouted, jumped and waved wildly to no avail, much to the amazement and amusement of beach goers. Suddenly she turned and aimed her camera. She had the bird!

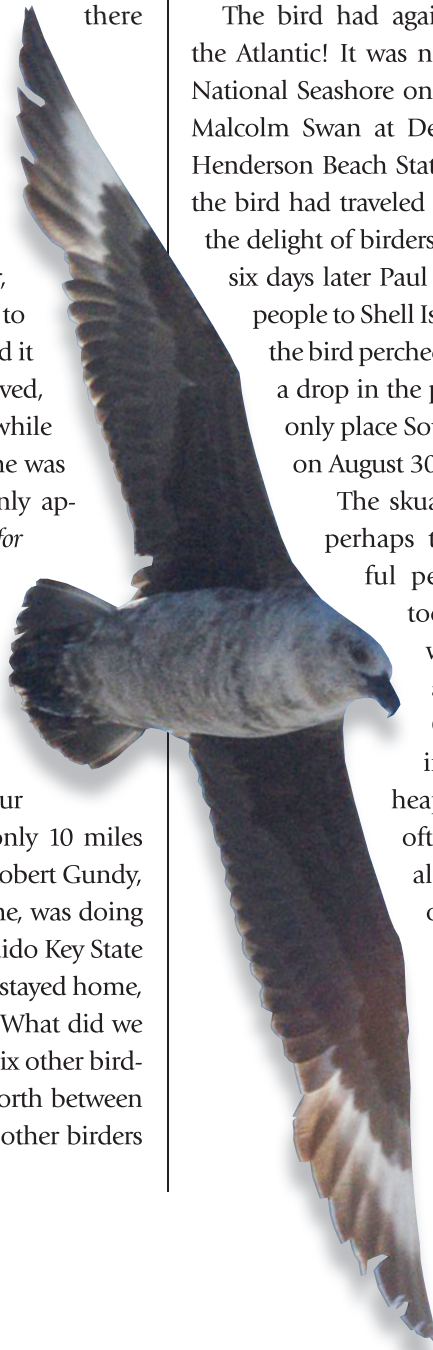
It would have been nice to have had it on our Florida state list; after all, the state line was only 10 miles away. Then, on August 2, Lucy got a text from Robert Gundy, a Tallahassee birder who, with Natasza Fontaine, was doing a Big Year for Florida. They had the bird at Perdido Key State Park here in Florida! We shunned the heat and stayed home, deciding to alert as many birders as possible. (What did we do before cell phones?) By the end of the day, six other birders had seen it. The bird wandered back and forth between the two states and by August 15, we nine and other birders had found it in Florida. And then it was gone.

Or so we thought. Four days later, Brenda and Jerry Calaway were birding Ft. Pickens, and encountered Joe Burgess who had seen the bird at the Ft. Pickens entrance while doing a shorebird survey! We rushed over and got to 'Pelagic Perch' (the elevated restrooms near the entrance) where they had the wayward skua in their scope on the beach. State bird!! Five other birders joined us with cameras, scopes and bins.

The bird had again moved east, perhaps looking for the Atlantic! It was next seen at Opal Beach, Gulf Islands National Seashore on August 21, then by Bruce Purdy and Malcolm Swan at Destin Pass on the 23rd, and later at Henderson Beach State Park even farther east. By that time the bird had traveled 72 miles from its original sighting to the delight of birders in two states. Again it vanished, then six days later Paul Mason, a boat captain, was shuttling people to Shell Island at Panama City Beach and found the bird perched on the jetties—another 48 miles, just a drop in the proverbial bucket from Antarctica, the only place South Polar Skuas breed! It was last seen on August 30.

The skua seemed to have no fear of people, perhaps thinking we were somewhat colorful penguins, and occasionally landing too close to our cameras. In Antarctica where South Polar Skuas breed, it is a visitor to dumps, even following C-130 contrails flying inland to landing strips, human habitation and trash heaps. Along the Gulf beaches, it was often seen feeding on fish washed up along the beach, or harassing terns just offshore.

When last reported, it was well fed, but with plumage looking quite ragged. We can hope that it is moving south along Florida's coast and molting along the way before flying *way* south for our winter, its breeding season in Antarctica.



AOS FALL VIRTUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 3-20, 2020

Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By PAT REED, *Secretary*



RESIDENT GEOFF HILL OPENED THE MEETING AT 10:00 a.m., Tuesday, October 20, via Zoom. Pat Reed moved the minutes of the July 27, 2020 meeting be approved. Upon second by Anne Miller the minutes were approved.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Geoff Hill reported the Fall meeting went well and asked for thoughts on the Winter meeting. Ken Hare expressed the need to reach more people, suggesting Mail Chimp, etc. as a means to streamline the AOS email list. Discussion followed as to security and cost for the members not on the email list. President Hill stated he would look further into this possibility.

Ken Hare suggested the winter meeting follow the pattern of the Fall meeting. Joan Dixon suggested there be a charge of \$10 as AOS is going in debt, and that the meeting information be furnished only to those who pay. Ken Hare suggested the registration deadline be moved up and be for members only with \$25 to join AOS. It was the consensus the Winter meeting follow the same schedule as the Fall meeting with a \$10 fee, and everyone must be a member.

The Spring meeting was addressed. Bob Reed suggested we move forward with plans to meet at Dauphin Island, stating it would be easy to switch to Zoom if necessary. Andrew Haffenden agreed, and Ken Hare inquired as to the possibility of a live meeting with Zoom access.

President Hill stated he understood the consensus for the Spring meeting is to follow the normal Dauphin Island schedule meeting at the Shelby Center with online access with all details to be worked out. Andrew Haffenden stated he would check on the Shelby Center.

President Hill stated AOS donated \$1,000 to DIBS for cleanup of Dauphin Island and asked if more could be given. Andrew Haffenden and Larry Gardella stated the cleanup would best be accomplished by those who care for the birds as paid crews wipe out everything. Andrew

Haffenden stated he would check with Ralph Havard, DIBS president for an update as to what is needed. After discussion of DIBS needs and AOS funds, Ken Hare moved the Executive Committee be authorized to donate up to \$2,500 as needed and requested by DIBS. Stan Hamilton seconded and the move carried.

Andrew Haffenden stated he would request DIBS furnish Ken Hare with information that can be used on the AOS website and ALBirds requesting donations to cover cleanup needs. Anne Miller requested photos for use on the website as well.

President Geoff Hill asked if AOS had an awards committee. Bob Reed reported there was one some time ago and suggested the Executive Committee serve as the Awards Committee.

President Hill stated more content is needed on the AOS website, i.e. Andrew's recent workshop, videos, pictures, etc. After discussion Anne Miller agreed to look into this further with Joe Watts. Ken Hare suggested Anne be authorized up to \$200 should an expense be incurred. These suggestions were approved without vote, and Anne stated she would get with Joe understanding she had a budget of \$200.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Joan Dixon reported income of \$8,297.79, and expenses of \$10,715.08, leaving a net loss of \$2,417.29. Joan moved the report be accepted, Larry Gardella seconded, and the move carried. (A copy of the Treasurer's Report is attached to original minutes.)

COMMITTEE REPORTS

PUBLIC RELATIONS—Anne Miller stated Joe Watts called attention to the fact PayPal had turned down several people who tried to join, pay dues and register. He recommended switching to Stripe. After discussion Bob Reed moved the Board authorize the Executive Committee to examine the situation and take whatever action deemed necessary. Anne Miller seconded and the move carried.

DAN C. HOLLIMAN RESEARCH COMMITTEE—Andrew Haffenden stated Greg Harber needed Board approval to move forward with the Holliman Research Awards. After discussion Ken Hare moved AOS not authorize the Holliman Awards this year. Bob Reed seconded and the move carried. MEETINGS—Ken Hare stated a Meeting Coordinator is needed as Kathryn Palmore has asked to be relieved of these duties. Harry Dean stated this is a two-person position. President Hill stated this must be filled prior to the Spring

meeting. Larry Gardella stated many people, when joining, indicate that they will volunteer. Joan Dixon suggested this be updated to provide a list of volunteer needs from which to choose. Ken Hare suggested putting something together for ALBirds asking AOS members to volunteer with results being furnished to Anne, Larry and Geoff.

Anne Miller moved to charge \$10 per person for the Winter meeting. Bob Reed seconded and the move passed with two abstentions.

A O S F A L L V I R T U A L M E E T I N G , O C T O B E R 3 - 2 0 , 2 0 2 0

AOS Fall 2020 Meeting Report

By GEOFF HILL & BOB REED

THE AOS WAS DRAGGED INTO THE WORLD OF virtual meetings by the necessity created by the COVID19 pandemic. We held our first ever virtual AOS meeting event on Friday, October 9, when members joined a Zoom social and slide-sharing event. Things got off to an unpleasant start when our meeting was “bombed” by outsiders. Bombing is a new form of debauchery that grew out of the need for many groups to meet online. Some internet marauders have decided that it is great fun to enter a meeting uninvited and throw out as much offensive material as possible before they are dropped from the meeting. We had to put up with a few minutes of racist rants, pornography, and literally anything that a person might find offensive. Unfortunately for the raiders, they picked on a group of older and more experienced people who are not easy to shock, and it all came to nothing except a three-minute delay in our social.

All of the feedback for the actual gathering has been positive. About 30 members joined online at the height of the party, and I think almost everyone connected with a member they had not spoken with in a while (sometimes not for a decade). Five members shared slides of recent bird outings. Slide sharing was easier with the on-line format than it has been at recent meetings, and I think the slides were clearer and more striking online. Unfortunately, not every member has the equipment or ability to join online meetings. On the other hand, this format can enable people who are no longer

mobile or who can rarely get away from work or family obligations to drive to meetings to join the group activity. Like it or not, we are limited to virtual meetings until the risk of contracting COVID19 is eliminated.

Saturday was planned to be a day of birding in your home patch. Unfortunately, Hurricane Delta had other ideas. In most parts of Alabama it rained all day, hard enough that most of the birds had more sense than those of us who tried to bird anyway.

Geoff Hill, our far-sighted president, had declared the entire week of October 3-9 as birding days for the fall meeting. Thus, we still had 97 species reported from 17 lists in Alabama and 17 species from one list submitted by Jean Folsom from Boulder, Colorado, which contained such wonderful birds as Red-shafted Flicker, Mountain Chickadee and Black-billed Magpie. I have heard a rumor that we should move an upcoming meeting to Boulder—well maybe it’s just a dream.

Saturday evening Drew Haffenden entertained and educated us with a terrific set of extraordinary photos of terns. The presentation showed us Drew’s exceptional talent as an instructor and as a photographer.

Al Batt, storyteller extraordinaire, entertained us with stories from his birding days, including a story of birding with Charles T. Flugum, author of *Birding from a Tractor Seat*. He made us laugh at our human nature, and at some of the antics of birds. It was a welcome distraction from viruses, hurricanes, politics, and isolation.

AOS FALL VIRTUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 3-20, 2020

Birding Near Home Compilation

FOR OUR VIRTUAL FALL MEETING, PARTICIPANTS submitted checklists for the period of October 3 to 9 from a nearby birding spot. The checklists were compiled and the highlights reviewed at Saturday's evening session. Seventeen lists were submitted with a total of 97 species. Jean Folsom submitted her "out of area" list from Boulder, Colorado!

Canada Goose
Wood Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Common Nighthawk
Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Killdeer
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Cattle Egret
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Eastern Screech-Owl
Barred Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
American Kestrel
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
Acadian Flycatcher

Least Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe
White-eyed Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Warbling Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Tree Swallow
Barn Swallow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown-headed Nuthatch
Carolina Wren
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Eastern Bluebird
Gray-cheeked Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
Wood Thrush
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Brown Thrasher
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
House Sparrow
House Finch
American Goldfinch
Chipping Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Eastern Towhee

Eastern Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Common Grackle
Ovenbird
Golden-winged Warbler
Blue-winged Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Hooded Warbler
American Redstart
Northern Parula
Magnolia Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler
Blackburnian Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Pine Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
Northern Cardinal

Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting

Jean's List from Boulder:
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Belted Kingfisher
Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker (red-shafted)
Blue Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Black-capped Chickadee
Mountain Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch
American Robin
House Finch
American Goldfinch
Dark-eyed Junco (1 pink-sided, 1 gray-headed, 1 slate-colored)
White-crowned Sparrow
Red-winged Blackbird
Yellow-rumped Warbler

Upcoming Meetings

WINTER MEETING—January 22-24, 2021
Virtual Meeting

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

FALL MEETING—October 14-16, 2021
Dauphin Island, Alabama (tentative)

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Spring 2021

February 10, 2021

Summer 2021

May 10, 2021

Wehle Land Conservation Center and Surrounding Wehle Forever Wild Tract

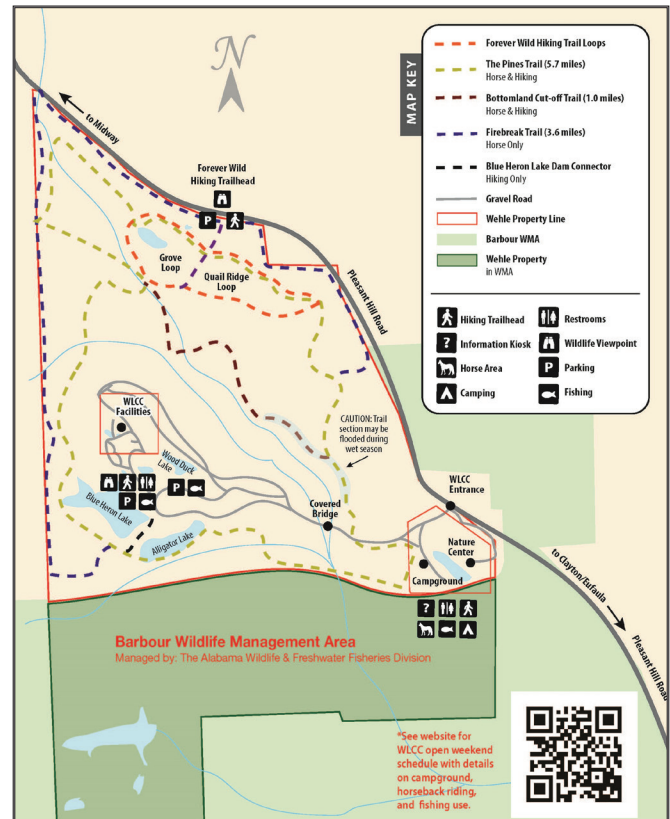
By ERIC SOEHREN

THE WEHLE LAND CONSERVATION CENTER (WLCC) dates back about 30 years when the late Mr. Robert G. Wehle offered his 1,505-acre life-estate near Midway, Alabama (Bullock County) to the Forever Wild Land Trust. From that and other acquisitions grew the Wehle Nature Center in 1998, and the WLCC in 2004.

The mission of the WLCC is very similar to other biological field stations, offering a balance of wildlife research and monitoring, on-site conservation, and environmental outreach as major components of the day-to-day operations. Additionally, partnerships with various organizations, institutions, and researchers are fostered to increase program opportunities for public interests. Examples of the monitoring and research initiatives currently underway at the WLCC include participation in the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) bird banding program, Eastern Bluebird nest box monitoring, herpetofaunal and small mammal surveys, monitoring of a translocated population of Gopher Tortoises, and a comprehensive floral inventory of the entire Wehle tract.

The Wehle Forever Wild Tract (surrounding the WLCC) is open daily to the public via several looping hiking trails and is accessible from the Forever Wild trailhead located along Pleasant Hill Road north of the main entrance to the WLCC. The Forever Wild trailhead is also a featured stop on the Wiregrass Birding Trail with over 175 species documented on the property. The trails enable access to frequently burned open pine forest with a diverse groundcover, bottomland hardwood forest and pond edges, which support a wide variety of species including often sought Bachman's Sparrow, Northern Bobwhite, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Red-headed Woodpecker, Kentucky Warbler and many others.

Additional opportunities for recreation are offered during scheduled Open Trails weekends, which provide free camping (semi improved and primitive), horseback riding, and fishing to the public. Campsite amenities include horse



stables, paddocks, covered pavilion, showers, and restrooms. Public fishing is permitted on select ponds during scheduled Open Trails Weekends (Saturdays only) and requires a state fishing license and adherence to posted creel limits.

The WLCC is closed to camping, horseback riding, and fishing in January, August and December.

Facility Rentals: The WLCC facilities include the Wehle Nature Center, Gatra Wehle Dormitory, Wehle Dining Hall, and two covered picnic pavilions are available to various groups and organizations to rent for day use or extended stay events or programs. The Wehle Nature Center has a meeting room (may seat up to 70 people), a 50-seat theater with a built-in high definition projector and retractable screen, independent restrooms, and a small kitchen. WIFI internet is available throughout the building. The Wehle Nature Center is a great place for group meetings, youth events and classes, or for any other day-use needs.

For more information about the Wehle Land Conservation Center, Open Trails weekend schedule or the Forever Wild Land Trust, please visit our website: www.alabamaforeverwild.com/wehle-tract. To make a reservation, call 334-529-3003.

Expanding Your Horizons with iNaturalist

THE INTERNET HAS BEEN AND IS OFFERING MANY NEW AND improved options for birders and naturalists in general. One of these is iNaturalist, which has robust image recognition software that can identify most living organisms within five seconds. Simply take a picture, frame it so that the subject is clear, and submit it on the iNaturalist app or on your computer. A list of ten of the most likely candidates will be displayed, accompanied by at least one photo, from which you can choose the correct organism.

iNaturalist.org began as the Master's final project of three students at UC Berkeley's School of Information in 2008. The iNaturalist website says, "iNaturalist helps you identify the plants and animals around you. Get connected with a community of over a million scientists and naturalists who can help you learn more about nature! What's more, by recording and sharing your observations, you'll create research quality data for scientists working to better understand and protect nature. iNaturalist is a joint initiative by the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society."

Some advantages to iNaturalist are that, generally speaking, a photo or sound recording is needed, so there is a concrete record of what you actually observed. It also allows your sightings to be verified or corrected by a large number of professionals and amateurs, helping build your ID skills and knowledge of living things around us.

Disadvantages are that you do need an observation, so particularly birds that are a distance away can be a problem, but publication quality photography is not necessary. Just as we now use distant photos to confirm a bird, less than great quality photos can still be useful in iNaturalist.

iNaturalist currently has over 35.5 million observations of over 108,000 species. Several AOS members are active observers, each with over 1,000 species.

iNaturalist also supports projects, which collect observations under a common purpose. For instance, there are at least 218 projects unique to Alabama, including such different items as gopher tortoise conservation, state parks, mammals of Alabama, birds of Alabama, and flora of Alabama. When you make an observation, you can add it to any appropriate project(s).

For instance, the Wehle Forever Wild Tract has 2,257 species recorded, and the Wehle Land Conservation Center has an amazing 1,066 species of moths recorded.

A camera in your pocket makes it exceptionally easy to record your observations, and iNaturalist makes it exceptionally easy to identify them. And doing so will make you much more observant of your natural surroundings and add to our knowledge of the flora and fauna.

Protect Our Birds Specialty License Plates Now Available



ALABAMA'S NATURE LOVERS CAN NOW CELEBRATE THE DIGNITY and beauty of their state's wild birds with a new specialty license plate. Available to Alabama residents, the PROTECT OUR BIRDS tag will generate revenue to support the conservation and outreach efforts of Alabama Audubon, celebrating seventy-five years working on behalf of birds and the people who love them.

Designed by students at UAB Bloom Studio, the PROTECT OUR BIRDS plate features an adult red-shouldered hawk perched in a longleaf pine, two species familiar to birdwatchers throughout Alabama.

There are now two ways to commit to the tag. Members of the public can make a commitment to purchase directly with the State of Alabama at alaudubon.org/get-the-tag, or they may request that Alabama Audubon cover the \$50 commitment-to-purchase fee. Details of both options are available at alaudubon.org/tag. Production of the plates requires 1,000 commitments to purchase by July 31, 2021. Once those commitments have been secured, the Alabama Department of Revenue will begin producing and distributing the plates.

Contact: Sarah Randolph, Outreach & Communications Director; sarah@alaudubon.org, 205-719-3678 ext. 3.

AOS WINTER VIRTUAL MEETING, JANUARY 16–23, 2021

AOS Winter Meeting

Registration is Required for Participation

THE AOS BOARD VOTED TO REQUIRE A MODEST REGISTRATION fee of \$10 per person for the winter meeting. The Zoom links will only be shared with registered members.

A CURRENT EMAIL ADDRESS IS IMPERATIVE FOR THE 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 registration to Joan Dixon. All of her contact information is on the registration page.

AOS Winter Meeting Schedule

January 16 to 22, 2021

BIRD NEAR HOME

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

Friday, January 22, 2021

ON-LINE SOCIAL

5:30–6:30 p.m. Open forum social

6:30–8:00 p.m. Member slides

Saturday, January 23, 2021

AOS BOARD MEETING

2:00–4:00 p.m. Via Zoom

WORKSHOP, COMPILATION, AND SPEAKER

6:30–6:45 p.m. Announcements and bird near home compilation/highlights

6:45–8:00 p.m. Speaker: Chris Elphick

Meet the Speaker: Chris Elphick

WITH RISING SEA LEVELS, TIDAL MARSHES AND SPECIES such as the saltmarsh sparrow that depend on them, face many threats. This talk will describe the status of tidal marsh birds in the northeast, the ways that marshes are changing, and the role that humans play in protecting coastal ecosystems. He also plans to discuss his hurricane work.

Chris Elphick is a professor of conservation biology in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Connecticut. He grew up in Cheshire, England, and has been interested in birds his entire life—one of his earliest memories is accidentally flushing a dozen long-eared owls from an orchard on a freezing cold morning and watching them all drift inches over the top of one of his father's mist nets.

He got his BSc at the University of East Anglia, United Kingdom, and spent many days on the north Norfolk coast, one of the best areas for birding in the British Isles. As an undergraduate he spent a summer doing bird and plant surveys in Chiapas, Mexico, and a year at the University of California, Irvine. After another year as an itinerant field biologist, he moved to the University of Nevada, Reno, where he did his PhD research in the Central Valley of California and took whatever opportunities he could to go birding in the northern Sierra Nevada and Great Basin. He moved to UConn in 1998 and has been studying coastal marsh birds and their habitats since 2002. He is one of the lead investigators for the Saltmarsh Habitat and Avian Research Program (SHARP), a collaborative initiative to understand the ecology and conservation of tidal-marsh birds along the Atlantic seaboard.

He is a strong advocate for integrating the skills of birders into scientific discovery.

His research has been published in journals such as the *Auk*, *Biological Conservation*, *Condor*, *Conservation Biology*, *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of*

Science of the USA, and *Science*. Book length projects include *Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*, *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Nevada*, and *Ecology and Conservation of Birds in Rice Fields: A Global Review*.

Lastly, he is committed to conservation action as much as to conservation research, and is a board member of the Bird Conservation Fund, a small non-profit focused on crowd-sourcing funds to help research directly related to the protection of some of the world's most endangered birds. To learn more about the organization visit: <https://www.birdfund.org/>.

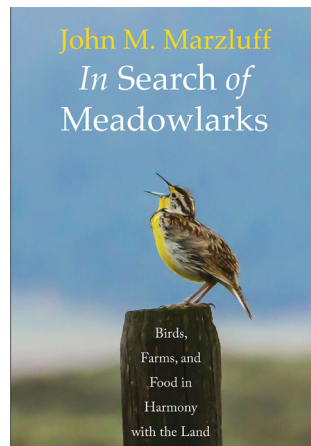
BOOK REVIEW

In Search of Meadowlarks

By VINCE MELESKI



JUST FINISHED A GREAT BOOK: *IN SEARCH OF Meadowlarks* by John M. Mazluff, professor of environmental and forest sciences at the University of Washington. The book covers his journeys across North and Central America to see if farmers can live in harmony with birds and wildlife while feeding the anticipated increases in world population. He discovers farmers are already doing a good job with sustainable farming on a vineyard in California, a cattle ranch in Montana, and a small farm in Costa Rica. The industrial grade farming in the Midwest of corn and soybeans from fence to fence with fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides has greatly reduced meadowlark habitat. He believes our current industrial farming can be modified to support increased wildlife by putting hard-to-farm land to conservation use with improvements in efficiency and wildlife if there is increased government support. The book looks at how we are going to feed the growing world population without clearing the



world's remaining forests for agriculture. It will require major changes including increasing farm efficiency, but it may be possible to accomplish it. There is a significant amount of food available to be added by greatly reducing food waste. By eating more vegetables and less meat, there is the possibility of reducing resources needed to raise animal protein and improve the environment at the same time. He believes it is possible to farm sustainably while feeding the world, coexisting with birds and wildlife, and providing healthy food. The book is filled with ideas and suggestions as to how to produce more food in harmony with nature.

Have You Read a Good Bird Book Lately?

IF 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.

New Members

Susan McCarthy
Sabrina Cobb
Olivia Morpeth
Ellen Roston
David Hewitt
Janice Neitzel
Tom Meyer
Eric Anderson

Honoraria and Acknowledgments

Donation to the Holliman Fund
Linda Reynolds

Donation to Alabama Ornithological Society
Doris Cheronos

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
 PLEASE ADD 3% TO PAYPAL TRANSACTIONS**

AOS WINTER MEETING 2021 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 January 18, 2021

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email Address _____ Phone _____

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

YOU CAN ALSO REGISTER ONLINE AT WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG	
Registration @ \$10 per person	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
DIBS Hurricane Damage Remediation	\$
2021 DUES	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

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Annual Membership:
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Sustaining: \$50 • Life (individual): \$350
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ALABAMA WILDBIRD CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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