

# THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 41, NO. 2 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SUMMER 2021

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

FOUNDED 1952



5

ON THE ROAD AGAIN  
CHAMBERS COUNTY KITE FIELDS  
*by Barry Fleming*

6

AOS 2021 VIRTUAL SPRING MEETING  
SPRING MEETING REPORT  
*by Larry Gardella, Geoff Hill, Bob Reed*

## IN THIS ISSUE

8

AOS 2021 VIRTUAL SPRING MEETING  
BIRDING NEAR HOME  
COMPILATION

*Cover: Swallow-tailed Kite by Bob Reed*

9

AOS 2021 VIRTUAL SPRING MEETING  
MINUTES OF THE  
AOS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

12

DIGITAL TOOLS TO HELP  
ALABAMA BIRDERS FIND BIRDS  
*by Anne G. Miller*

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# Fallout from the Fallout

**I** THINK THAT MANY AOS MEMBERS share my frustration that after perhaps a decade of April meetings with disappointing numbers of migrant birds, the bird floodgates opened in a year when we cancelled our in-person spring meeting on Dauphin Island due to the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. On Saturday, April 17, the day when—if not for the pandemic—we would have been gathered at Dauphin Island, one of the best fallouts in memory occurred. Anyone who follows Murphy's Law could have predicted this cruel twist of fate, but it was a bit dispiriting, nonetheless.

Thank goodness that those who stayed away from the coast and attended the fall meeting over Zoom were treated to a fantastic presentation by Scott Weiden-saul, a world-renowned writer and speaker whose new book *A World on the Wing* is currently on the *New York Times* best-seller list for non-fiction. Scott took us on a world-spanning tour of avian conservation with some rather depressing tales of the massive take of migrants in southern Europe and the harm that urban lights can cause to migrants. But he also inspired us with a story of Amur Falcons in the Indian state Nagaland that emphasized hope for future bird populations. I think everyone who listened to Scott's talk was swayed to do more for avian conservation.

There are many ways to work for bird conservation. One of the most significant—if you have decent birding skills—is to help with the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). The Breeding Bird Survey was started in 1966 by Chan Robbins, a United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) employee as well as the author of the bird book that I first used when I began birding as a pre-teen (*The Golden Guide to Field Identification of North American Birds*). Each BBS route is laid out along 25 miles of road with 50 designated stops—one every half mile. Birds are tallied for three minutes at each stop. These routes were, with few exceptions, established decades ago, and they



are scattered all over the U.S. and Canada, including across Alabama. Each route is run only once a year. If you ever wondered how professional ornithologists and conservation biologists can talk with confidence about the decline of specific Neotropical migrant birds or the loss of 3 billion birds in North America, the answer is the BBS. This is the only standardized survey of birds in North America, and the value of a long-term and on-going assessment of populations of birds during the breeding season is incalculable. Without the BBS, we would be left with impressions, opinions, and piecemeal data instead of standardized survey results, and the impetus for bird conservation would be far less.

Even though the BBS was established by and remains coordinated by the USFWS and Canadian Fish and Wildlife Service, federal employees do only a small minority of counts. The great majority of BBS routes are run by volunteers and, as with any volunteer program, there is never enough help to get all the work done. Our state coordinator for the BBS is Eric Soehren, and Eric just sent out a plea for help to get more BBS routes covered. As of 20 April, 2021, nine BBS routes in Alabama were not assigned to any counter. Allowing these routes to go uncounted diminishes the coverage of the BBS and makes the baseline for the state of Alabama birds that much less well documented.

When I named the qualification for running a BBS route, I stated that you must be a decent birder. I did not say that you need to be an elite birder who can glance at a flock of gulls and know the species and age of every bird. You need to be familiar with the common breeding birds in the part of Alabama that you cover. Rarely do you encounter a vagrant or a very odd bird on a BBS—and such a bird would have no bearing on the goal of your BBS route. Running a BBS is about enumerating common birds like Northern Bobwhite, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers; it is

explicitly not about looking for rarities. If you are committed to bird conservation and you know the birds that you encounter in the summer in your part of the state, then you should be doing BBS routes if you are able.

The value of BBS routes is never more in evidence than when AOS members try to ascertain trends in bird populations from occurrences in migrant traps. Over recent years, I repeated heard claims that the populations of birds in the US and Canada had dwindled so much that fallouts were a thing of the past. The fallout of April 17 demonstrated in dramatic fashion that the billion birds that continue to migrate along the gulf coast can still produce an impressive fallout. The point is that we should not look to the number of Indigo Buntings that we see in the Shell Mounds as an index of the

health of Indigo Bunting numbers in North America. We should look to the BBS data. And the BBS data are only there to be examined if volunteers make sure that routes get run every year.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Pat and I ran two routes for many years until my hearing failed to the point that I could no longer hear the birds well enough. Those were "our" routes; we were invested in them. We monitored them year-round, and were acutely attuned to every change. One segment of public road was closed, and the route had to be changed to include a long detour, which messed with the time and distance. We thoroughly enjoyed doing the BBS routes and looked forward to them each year. I strongly encourage you to join Eric in these routes. You will not regret it.*

#### DAUPHIN ISLAND BIRD SANCTUARIES REPORT

## Great Accomplishments in 2021

By GREG HARBER



ON BEHALF OF THE DAUPHIN ISLAND BIRD SANCTUARIES, Inc. (DIBS) board of directors, we would like to extend our thanks to the AOS Board of Directors and its members who have been so supportive of DIBS's efforts to conserve and protect habitat for migratory birds on Dauphin Island. Many of you have supported our efforts, and we have made great progress in protecting the best habitat on the island, with wetlands and select uplands being our primary focus.

We continue to build on that progress, and thus far, in calendar year 2021, we have purchased three more properties on the island and have been gifted a fourth, by Mr. Roger Tingley, in memory of his wife, Bonita, who passed recently. We are especially pleased with the recent acquisition, by one of our partners, of several lots located in the Steiner block!

Many of you are familiar with the Goat Trees Reserve, located at the intersection of Cadillac Avenue and Grant Street, which is one of the island's premiere birding sites. What you may not know is that, with the exception of two private properties located on the east side of Grant Street, the remaining lots on the east side of Grant Street are also protected by

DIBS. (Birders, please respect the boundaries of these two private properties and do not trespass).

The exciting news is this: several properties on the east (opposite) side of the Steiner block—those which front on Fort Conde Street—were recently placed on the market and, we are happy to report, were purchased by one of DIBS's partners! Essentially, the northern half of the east side of the Steiner block—extending to and including the marsh lots at the end of Fort Conde Street—were included in the sale. There is still one marsh lot that remains in private hands but will likely never be developed because it is a wetland and there is no access.

There remain a few lots on the west side of Fort Conde Street (eastern side of the Steiner block) that are closer to Bienville Boulevard that remain in private hands, but we are hoping with recent developments that DIBS will prevail in acquiring and permanently protecting those lots. The conservation value in preserving almost the entirety of the Steiner block is a testament to the perseverance and dedication of many people over the years—not the least of which was the late Dr. John F. Porter, founding executive director of DIBS.

We thank you for your dedication and support; stay tuned as our habitat conservation efforts continue.

# Kite Fields in Chambers County

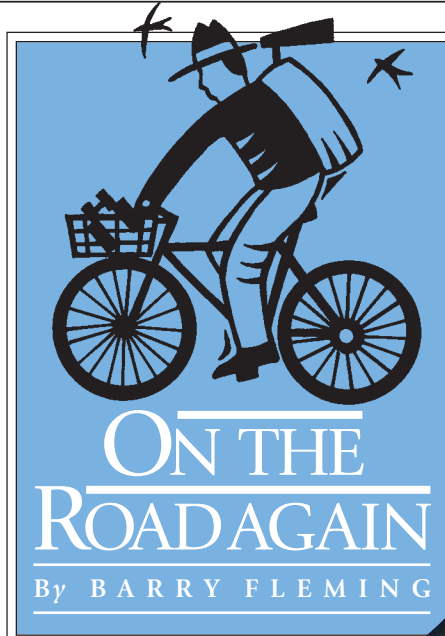


MOST ALABAMA BIRDERS recognize the Black Belt, from Autauga County west to the state line, as

the corridor taken by Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites through Alabama during post-breeding dispersal, before departure to wintering grounds in South America. Birders should also know about the kite fields of east Alabama, in the Piedmont region of Chambers County. In fact, the most purple area in the state on eBird, representing frequency of observation for MIKI, is in Chambers County, and STKI is in the purple there too.

Eleven years ago, long-time AOS member Lorna West called me about a large group of Mississippi Kites she was studying. When I arrived, the numbers had diminished, but I still counted sixty-five. She and I also had Swallow-tailed Kites that year. Both species have been recorded in numbers each year since. But, in terms of a long, impressive season for swallowtails, 2020 was it.

The first 2020 observation for Swallow-tailed was two birds on 12 July. One week later the number was fifteen, a week later thirty-four, a week later fifty-seven, with forty-seven seen feeding in one group. Swallowtails have been seen here in the past from 3 July to 27 August. My highest number in a group until this year was sixteen birds ten years ago. Most days the average numbers recorded was two to five birds. I had both species each trip during nine visits in 2017, but swallowtails on only half the trips in 2019.



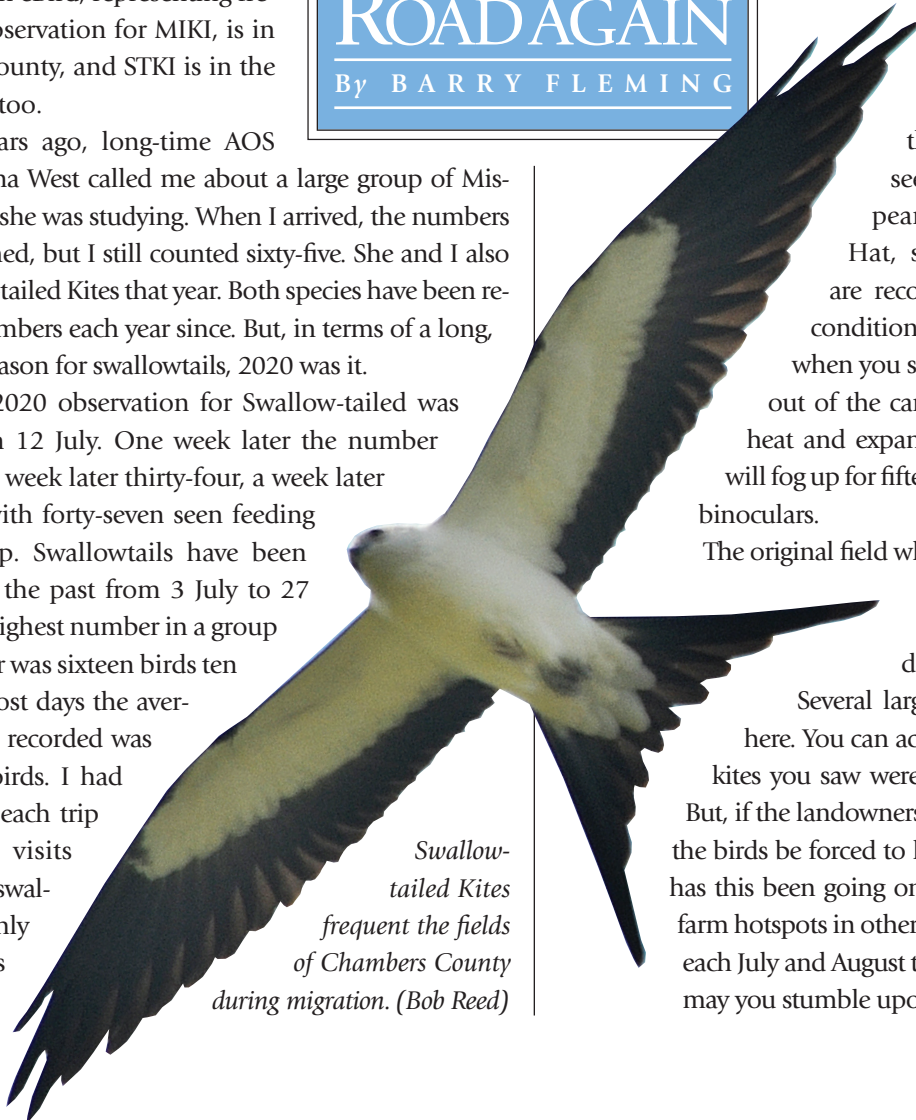
To realize the Chambers County kite fields, one can perform an eBird species search of Swallow-tailed Kite records and notice a distinct oval about five miles wide by three deep, from Oak Bowery to Cusseta, in Chambers county. Viewed in terrain mode, it is easy to see why. These are roughly connected working farm fields surrounded by large areas of forests. No stores or gas stations, but beautiful farms set among rolling hills, with many places to easily pull over and get out.

Slowly cruising the roads, looking up, may be the best practice. The kites seem to appear and disappear out of nowhere. Note:

Hat, sunscreen and sunglasses are recommended and if the air-conditioner in your vehicle is on high when you slam on the brakes and hop out of the car into the searing Alabama heat and expansive light, your binoculars will fog up for fifteen minutes, even fog-proof binoculars.

The original field where Lorna and I viewed the kites hasn't been farmed the same recently and the birds do not gather there anymore.

Several large farms are still operating here. You can actually tell people where the kites you saw were by the name of the farm. But, if the landowners change their practices, will the birds be forced to hunt elsewhere? How long has this been going on? Are there other working-farm hotspots in other counties where kites gather each July and August that we don't know of? If so, may you stumble upon one.



*Swallow-tailed Kites frequent the fields of Chambers County during migration. (Bob Reed)*

AOS SPRING VIRTUAL MEETING, APRIL 10-17, 2021

# AOS Spring 2021 Meeting Report

By LARRY GARDELLA, GEOFF HILL & BOB REED



ONE OF MY BIRDING VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES, CONDUCTING pulses for the Alabama Audubon Society's coastal bird survey, allowed me to get some birds for the AOS spring compilation. On April 12, I parked my car at Village Point Preserve and walked from there to the start of the Bayfront pulse. On the way I heard Pine, Yellow-rumped, Hooded and Kentucky Warblers and several Northern Parulas. On the pulse, we counted 49 species of birds, including Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, a female Painted Bunting and the following warblers: Prothonotary, Northern Parula, Pine, Prairie, Yellow-rumped, Yellow-throated and a Common Yellowthroat. As usual we finished the pulse on the boardwalk just outside the woods. We then walked from there through Village Point Preserve to get to my car. A bit more than halfway through this walk, a Blue-winged Warbler was singing. When I looked right next to it I saw a bird with gray on the throat and face that made me start to say "Golden-winged Warbler", which is a very close relative of Blue-winged and maybe my favorite warbler. I stopped myself, however, realizing that this bird was as yellow below as the Blue-winged, while Golden-winged Warblers have white breasts and bellies. Instead, it was a rare Lawrence's Warbler, a backcross hybrid of Blue-winged and Golden-winged. While getting dinner together, Andrea and I saw our last warblers for the day: a Worm-eating Warbler, a Prothonotary Warbler and two Northern Parulas, all coming to our bird baths, as a good number of warblers have done this spring.

—Larry Gardella

I CONDUCTED MY BIRDING NEAR HOME BY WALKING THE Kennedy Unit at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge. When there are no open hunting seasons, as in April, the Kennedy Unit is the place to go for isolation in a pandemic. It is also the place to go for otherwise hard-to-find marsh birds. I was able to find resident Purple Gallinules, Com-

mon Gallinules, Least Bittern, King Rail, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and White Ibis along with about 80 species of more common birds.

—Geoff Hill

I WAS UNFORTUNATELY NOT WELL FOR THE WEEKEND, SO BIRDING was not possible. The first highlight for me was the terrific workshop given by Greg Jackson on vireo identification. I learned that it is important to look at all of the field marks, often very subtle, such as the difference in the faint gray or yellow of the under-tail coverts or throat versus flank. It was one of the best workshops I have ever had the privilege to participate in.

I have admired Scott Weidensaul ever since I read his book *Living on the Wing* on the way back from Korea several years ago. Since then I have essentially read everything of his I could get my hands on. I was thrilled to meet him while he was banding with Bob and Martha. I believe he's one of the top three wildlife authors today. He spoke to us on his latest book, *A World on the Wing*. It was a combination of astonishing facts about migration and a call for targeted conservation, often through education, and offering viable alternatives.

The premier birding event was happening on the coast where we should have been, but for the pandemic...

—Bob Reed

## Fallout!

WHAT'S SHELL MOUND SYNCHRONY? A CROWD OF BIRDERS that suddenly raises binoculars and cameras at the same time pointed in the same direction. This was repeated often as birders focused in on the hundreds of Neotropical migrants darting in all directions. There were excited high-fives and a few happy dances accentuating the animated chatter of birders watching the kaleidoscope of migrants flitting everywhere.

Quick! A Great Crested Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Prothonotary, Orchard Oriole, House Wren, Common Yellowthroat and a Scarlet Tanager! Over to the left! Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes right together! What? You didn't see the Redstarts? They're over here with the Kentucky! Wherever birders looked there were migrants! (And wherever you looked, there were birders!) While some birders watched in the "bowl" of the Shell Mound, others lined the east side roadway, marveling at multiple Prothonotaries while Indigo and Painted Buntings flecked a nearby lawn.

Mostly freed from Covid restrictions, many of us escaped to Dauphin Island on AOS weekend, our first outing in over a year, even though the meeting was held online. In addition to the most fabulous fallout in many years, we enjoyed friends and catching up with them, though I dare say few sentences were completed without "Oh! Look! There goes a...!"

At one point, Bob, Joan Dixon and I found ourselves on the east end of the island looking for Bobolinks. Before we even got out of the van, a Yellow-headed Blackbird dived into the thicket while a dozen Red-eyed Vireos popped up from the tall grasses and disappeared just as quickly. A few Bobolinks sat atop the wet grasses, and a red fox trotted to the edge and disappeared. The wall of limbs separating Fort Gaines from the field sparkled with Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Blue Grosbeaks, a few Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and Baltimore Orioles. While standing in the field, we watched three flocks of Eastern Kingbirds take off, gain altitude and leave the island. Two flocks headed east toward Fort Morgan, and one headed north.

The oaks on the dunes behind the fort were peppered with warblers. Bob said there were more Black-throated Greens than he'd ever seen in his life. Everywhere we looked there were warblers, often three or four in one field of view. Blackpolls, Cape Mays, Prothonotaries, Blackburnians, Yellows, Tennessees, Magnolias, Black and Whites. And then we got the call—a Fork-tailed Flycatcher had been found at Fort Morgan!

We and a few other birders caught the next ferry east with hopes high to see the fork-tail, Alabama's fourth record. En route we spotted a Swallow-tailed Kite winging in from the Gulf. Things were looking good. But our search of Fort Morgan's marshes didn't yield The Flycatcher, and we turned to the puddled airstrip for shorebirds. Not disappointing, we found Black-necked Stilts, Least, Western, Baird's, White-

rumped, Solitary and Pectoral Sandpipers, with a random Killdeer in the dry grass.

An astonishing few days on the Island, hampered with rain and mud, and we easily found 24 species of warblers among the 137 species we logged in two-and-a-half days. Many other species were found this AOS weekend, showcasing the intrinsic value of this unique island for birds. The island's oaks and thickets support thousands of migrants coming and going on their spectacular migrations. We have been lucky to see just a few. How can we not support Dauphin Island's habitats for the birds we love?

—Lucy Duncan

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### *Thanks for the 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.

### *Upcoming Meetings*

**FALL MEETING**—October 8–10, 2021

Dauphin Island, Alabama

**WINTER MEETING**—January 28–30, 2022

TBA

**SPRING MEETING**—April 15–17, 2022

Dauphin Island, Alabama

### *Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions*

Fall 2021

August 10, 2021

Winter 2021

November 10, 2021

A O S SPRING VIRTUAL MEETING, APRIL 10-17, 2021

# Birding Near Home Compilation

**F**OR OUR VIRTUAL SPRING MEETING, participants submitted checklists for the period of April 10 to 17 from a nearby birding spot. Fifteen checklists were compiled and the highlights reviewed at Saturday's evening session. Lists were submitted with a total of 205 species. Notable birds are in *Italic*.

Black-bellied Whistling-duck  
Canada Goose  
Wood Duck  
Blue-winged Teal  
Northern Shoveler  
Gadwall  
Mallard  
Northern Pintail  
Ring-necked Duck  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Pied-billed Grebe  
Northern Gannet  
Magnificent Frigatebird  
Rock Pigeon  
Mourning Dove  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
White-winged Dove  
Black-billed Cuckoo  
Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
Common Nighthawk  
Chimney Swift  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
King Rail  
Clapper Rail  
Sora  
Purple Gallinule  
Common Gallinule  
American Coot  
Black-necked Stilt  
American Avocet  
Killdeer  
Snowy Plover  
Piping Plover  
Semipalmated Plover  
Wilson's Plover  
Black-bellied Plover  
Ruddy Turnstone

Stilt Sandpiper  
Sanderling  
Dunlin  
Least Sandpiper  
Semipalmated Sandpiper  
Western Sandpiper  
Short-billed Dowitcher  
Long-billed Dowitcher  
Wilson's Snipe  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Solitary Sandpiper  
Lesser Yellowlegs  
Willet  
Greater Yellowlegs  
Whimbrel  
Laughing Gull  
Ring-billed Gull  
Herring Gull  
Least Tern  
*Great Black-backed Gull*  
Gull-billed Tern  
Caspian Tern  
Forster's Tern  
Royal Tern  
Sandwich Tern  
Common Tern  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Anhinga  
American White Pelican  
Brown Pelican  
Least Bittern  
Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret  
Snowy Egret  
Little Blue Heron  
Reddish Egret  
Cattle Egret  
Green Heron

Yellow-crowned Night-heron  
Black-crowned Night-heron  
White Ibis  
Glossy Ibis  
Black Vulture  
Turkey Vulture  
Osprey  
Swallow-tailed Kite  
Bald Eagle  
Northern Harrier  
Cooper's Hawk  
Broad-winged Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Red-shouldered Hawk  
Eastern Screech-Owl  
Great Horned Owl  
Barred Owl  
Belted Kingfisher  
Red-headed Woodpecker  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Pileated Woodpecker  
American Kestrel  
Merlin  
Peregrine Falcon  
Acadian Flycatcher  
Eastern Phoebe  
Great Crested Flycatcher  
Eastern Kingbird  
Gray Kingbird  
Loggerhead Shrike  
White-eyed Vireo  
Blue-headed Vireo  
Yellow-throated Vireo  
Red-eyed Vireo  
Black-whiskered Vireo  
Blue Jay  
American Crow  
Fish Crow  
Purple Martin  
Tree Swallow  
Northern Rough-winged Swallow  
Bank Swallow  
Cliff Swallow  
Cave Swallow  
Barn Swallow

Carolina Chickadee  
Tufted Titmouse  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
Brown-headed Nuthatch  
House Wren  
Marsh Wren  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Eastern Bluebird  
Swainson's Thrush  
Wood Thrush  
Veery  
American Robin  
Gray Catbird  
Brown Thrasher  
Northern Mockingbird  
European Starling  
Cedar Waxwing  
House Sparrow  
House Finch  
Purple Finch  
Pine Siskin  
American Goldfinch  
Eastern Towhee  
Chipping Sparrow  
Clay-colored Sparrow  
Field Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow  
Seaside Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
Swamp Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Baltimore Oriole  
Orchard Oriole  
Red-winged Blackbird  
*Yellow-headed Blackbird*  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Common Grackle  
Boat-tailed Grackle  
Bobolink  
Ovenbird  
Worm-eating Warbler  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
Northern Waterthrush  
Blue-winged Warbler  
Golden-winged Warbler  
"Lawrence's Warbler"

Black-and-white Warbler  
Prothonotary Warbler  
Swainson's Warbler  
Tennessee Warbler  
Orange-crowned Warbler  
Kentucky Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
Hooded Warbler  
American Redstart  
Cape May Warbler  
Cerulean Warbler  
Northern Parula  
Bay-breasted Warbler  
Yellow Warbler  
Chestnut-sided Warbler  
Blackburnian Warbler  
Blackpoll Warbler  
Black-throated Blue Warbler  
Palm Warbler  
Pine Warbler  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
Yellow-throated Warbler  
Prairie Warbler  
Black-throated Green Warbler  
Summer Tanager  
Scarlet Tanager  
Northern Cardinal  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Blue Grosbeak  
Indigo Bunting  
Painted Bunting

## Contributors

John Cole  
Bob Duncan  
Lucy Duncan  
Barry Fleming  
Larry Gardella  
Dorris Gertler  
Allison Graves  
Drew Haffenden  
Stan Hamilton  
Greg Harbor  
Ken Hare  
Geoff Hill  
Anne Miller  
Brian Naylor  
Stacy Sapp



AOS SPRING VIRTUAL MEETING, APRIL 10-17, 2021

# Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By PAT REED, Secretary



RESIDENT GEOFF HILL OPENED THE MEETING OF THE AOS Board of Directors at 2:00 p.m., Saturday, April 17, 2021, via Zoom. The winter minutes were approved.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Hill reported that the sale of spring meeting speaker Scott Weidensaul's book *A World on the Wing* was being handled through a third party. AOS furnishes the number of books sold, sends them a check with a mailing list, and they mail the books. Ken Hare asked the sale deadline be extended through Saturday, April 24, 2021. This met with approval. Ken also thanked Anne Miller and Joe Watts for their work.

President Hill stated he was optimistic that the fall meeting could be held in-person as everyone should have the vaccine by that time. After discussion it was agreed to have an in-person meeting with continuing COVID precautions, especially the COVID restrictions of the Shelby Center.

President Hill reported for Eric Soehren, stating he had been contacted by a group interested in sponsoring AOS in exchange for promoting their products. President Hill stated he had also been contacted and said this could produce funds for AOS. After discussion President Hill said he would look further into this after the fall meeting.

President Hill stated that two positions needed to be filled, preferably before the fall meeting: treasurer and meeting coordinator. The new treasurer will need to be trained. Vice President Fleming said he had no one lined up for either of the positions. After discussion the consensus was for Vice President Fleming to search for a treasurer and place that nominee's name before the Board for an email/Zoom vote.

Vice President Fleming stated he understood the necessity of getting in touch with the Shelby Center as soon as possible and further stated he would check on the previously-owned Methodist Church Fellowship Hall as a backup.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

Joan Dixon reported income of \$5,360.80, expenses of \$3,552.29, leaving a net income of \$1,808.51. Total assets of \$55,145.13. The treasurer's report was accepted as presented.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Public Relations**—Anne Miller stated the website now features *Alabama Birdlife* in full color. Anne also suggested the need for a new logo. After discussion of various ideas, Barry Fleming volunteered to look into this matter and report at the fall meeting.

**Education**—Shirley Farrell's written report follows: We partnered with Legacy to help sponsor the Mountains to the Gulf teacher workshop. This workshop was five days long with teachers participating for five hours a day viewing videos of various locations, learning about Alabama geology, hydrology, biology, etc., participating in hands-on activities and writing in reflection journals. Starting in the northern part of the state we traveled to Dauphin Island to learn how everything is connected. Teachers were mailed kits that included binoculars and a bird field guide. I taught birding with students and how to use binoculars; we made bird feeders, and teachers were given Flying WILD curriculum paid for by AOS.

We continue to support and participate with the Alabama Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools. I am a committee member. We awarded a bluebird house to the one Green Ribbon School winner. Don Self, who makes the bluebird houses, is moving out of state. He has given me a contact of another woodworker who would be willing to make birdhouses, however I would also appreciate any suggestions of other individuals who would be willing to donate bird houses.

**Conservation**—Greg Harber reported provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are again being considered. He has

submitted comments as have several other organizations. **Membership**—Larry Gardella reported the pandemic has caused people to get out, and several former members have joined as well as some new members. President Hill suggested we play off the “Just Get Out” theme and emphasize AOS. Ken Hare and Larry Gardella agreed and will work on this.

Ken Hare stated the pandemic seems to have created the idea that birding is a good idea. He suggested a business-size card with AOS information, i.e., meeting dates, website, etc. be printed and given to members to hand to prospective members. He and his wife, Julie, will pay for the printing of the first 200 and will have them at the fall meeting. This met with approval. Bob Reed reminded the Board that several years ago we had a similar card to hand to Dauphin Island merchants to show our economic presence on the island.

**Bird Records**—President Hill reported for Greg Jackson. The signage at Fort Morgan is going up. All records are up-to-date.

**Dan C. Holliman Research Committee**—Greg Harber reported no requests for proposals were issued as per Board decision; however, one inquiry was received. He reported several universities have requested money for overhead

for administrating grants. After discussion, the consensus was this program should resume. He noted the donation made by Linda Reynolds.

**Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries**—Andrew Haffenden reported for DIBS, stating there have been a number of purchases, and the boundary problem at Grant Street has been resolved. Several properties were mentioned including one that has been purchased and is being held until DIBS can purchase it. He stated over \$5,000 was received for the cleanup after the hurricanes.

**The Yellowhammer**—Bob Reed expressed appreciation for articles received for *The Yellowhammer* and requested more. He noted a correction of fall meeting dates as published. These should be October 8, 9 and 10. The deadline for the summer issue is May 10. He suggested everyone who has been out and gotten a good bird list to write a paragraph of their experience, send it in, and he will consolidate them. Anne Miller suggested the lead article be about DIBS and Greg Harber agreed to write this for *The Yellowhammer*.

Ken Hare stated Geoff Hill has given permission on his video blog for various things.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:55 pm.

## Chicken Run

By GEOFF HILL



GOT THE NEWS FROM MARK MCSHANE VIA THE Georgia Bird Alert (GABO) listserv: the American Birding Association (ABA) checklist committee had added Red Junglefowl in the town of Fitzgerald, Georgia, to the ABA list. The chickens in this town were now potential life birds.

How did a barnyard bird in an urban environment come to be recognized as an established wild bird by the ABA? The backstory is fascinating. These are not escaped domestic birds. The birds roaming Fitzgerald are descendants of wild Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) captured in forests in Burma in 1960 and transported to the southeastern United States to be introduced as a new game bird. In the early 1960s, about 10,000 Red Junglefowl were propagated from approximately 100 wild birds brought to the U.S., and these wild-derived

Red Junglefowl were released into the countryside of southeastern states, including about 2,000 birds near Fitzgerald, Georgia. A nice account of this bit of Wildlife Biology history can be read here: <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/november-december-2014/stalking-wild-ur-chicken>

The released Red Junglefowl did not become established in natural Georgia habitats, but a population of phenotypically pure Red Junglefowl descended from the introduced birds became established by the 1970s in the small town of Fitzgerald. Those birds have now been breeding in Fitzgerald for 50 years, and the ABA correctly identified this population as a fully established introduced wild bird. If you see a Red Junglefowl in Fitzgerald, it counts on your ABA (life) list just like House Sparrows, Rock Pigeons, or Himalayan Snowcock count in areas where they have been established.

I decided to stop at Fitzgerald on my way back from a trip to the Georgia coast instead of in the afternoon on my way out, so I could be in the junglefowl area at sunrise. In my experience--and I was taught this as a preschooler watching cartoons--roosters make a lot of noise at sunrise. The Fitzgerald chickens did not disappoint.

I approached Fitzgerald from the east with my car windows down about 20 minutes before sunrise. About 8 blocks from the town center, I heard my first cock-a-doodle-do. Then another. Then another. I turned north on a side street and roosters were crowing in all directions. It was still too dark to see well so I just drove slowly around and tried to get a sense of how many birds were crowing. It was a lot of birds--dozens. As the day brightened, Red Junglefowl became easy to see. I had read some reports on eBird that at midday it can take a bit of searching to see a Red Junglefowl in Fitzgerald. That is not true at dawn in November. I hate to say you could not possibly miss these birds, because I've been told that for birds that I missed. But in this case—you cannot possibly miss Red Junglefowl in Fitzgerald, Georgia, at daybreak. Red Junglefowl were along almost every street and very often standing in the middle of the street. There were both roosters and hens (but no young birds so maybe no fall breeding). They typically ran from my car as I approached, but they usually went only a couple of tens of feet before stopping in full view. You could also just park in the path of an approaching bird and it would walk right up.

I spent my first 40 minutes cruising east to west about 5 blocks north of downtown.

I think Red Junglefowl are densest in this area, based on my brief experience in the town. I put 38 Red Junglefowl on my eBird check-

list for this northern part of town but that was a conservative estimate. Between birds heard and seen, I could easily have detected 70 chickens. I then passed through downtown and drove around the neighborhoods in the south part of the city. It seemed to me that Red Junglefowl were only about half as dense in the southern suburbs, but I thought the birds let me approach closer and most of my photographs are from the south side of the city.

Fitzgerald is a small town with a population of about 8000. It has a city center that is about four square blocks and residential houses extending about a dozen streets out from this center. Red Junglefowl are common throughout the residential areas.

I highly recommend a trip to Fitzgerald, Georgia, for any birder traveling to the region. I wasn't sure what sort of birding experience this chicken run would be. As it turned out, it was a blast. These are legitimate wild birds. Almost all of the birds that I saw were phenotypically pure Red Junglefowl. The roosters have beautiful golden hackle feathers, vibrant wattles and combs, and spectacular curved and iridescent tails. All of the birds that I saw had dark gray legs. Next time you are around domestic chickens, pay attention to leg color. There is some variation among breeds, but most barnyard chickens have yellow, yellowish, or at least pale legs. Yellow and pale legs is actually a trait that was introgressed from the Gray Junglefowl into domestic chickens. It is ubiquitous in domestic chickens. My life Red Junglefowl had dark gray legs, just like their ancestors in the forests of Burma.



*The Red Junglefowl has been added to the ABA checklist. (Wikimedia Commons)*

# Digital Tools to Help Alabama Birders Find the Birds They Want to See

By ANNE G. MILLER



ALABAMA'S BIRDERS HAVE DEVELOPED NEW WAYS TO find out where the birds are, by following online where Alabama's most dedicated birders are birding on any day in any season.

Sightings of unusual birds are typically reported within a few hours if not minutes, so anyone who's interested can head for that location. If you'd like to try this powerful approach to finding birds, here are some of the best digital sources of information about bird sightings in Alabama.

## ALBIRDS.COM

ALBirds (AOS sponsored) is an email group that offers a chance for all birders to tag along and learn from some of Alabama's best birders. Legendary AOS birders such as Bob and Lucy Duncan, Larry Gardella, Geoff Hill, Greg Jackson, Damien Simbeck, and others post fascinating accounts of their birding exploits in Alabama and north Florida, along with very useful information about the comings and goings of birds. ALBirds posts also include timely commentary from Bob Duncan on the influence of weather on bird migration. ALBirds is a free service of AOS, so all you have to do is join the group (ALBirds@groups.io), and decide how often you want to receive the email posts (daily or as they are posted). Here's a recent example of an ALBirds post, this one by Damien Simbeck in north Alabama on October 30:

*Ashley Peters sent me a text this morning with a photo of White-winged Scoters at Church Pond.*

*Of course, I was working at Guntersville at the time. When I returned home, I headed to Church Pond and found no scoters, only Ring-necked and Ruddy Ducks. I did find an American Golden Plover, Dunlin, and a Greater Yellowlegs.*

*As I left, I saw a bunch of ducks at Cattle Pond so I stopped. All I could find were Mallards and Gadwall. Then I saw some ducks standing on a hay bale. Poor light conditions, but still easy to ID Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. As I was heading to*

*Florence, I thought I'd check the Cypress Creek Sewage Ponds, just in case the scoters had moved. They had, and were close to the road in good light.*

*A Green Heron was also there. The Sewage Ponds are open until 5 today, but hours vary on weekends. Morning is usually best.*

*Even on weekends, you MUST check in at the last building before visiting the ponds. Scoters and heron were at the first pond.*

Damien Simbeck

Killen AL

A post like this not only offers some great locations to look for interesting birds, but it also gives you unforgettable insight into the way a skilled birder searches strategically for a particular species when it's not where it was originally reported. Incidentally, Dee Gertler and I drove up from Birmingham to see those White-winged Scoters, and found them at the Cypress Creek Sewage Ponds, as Damien had reported.

## eBIRD.ORG

Cornell Lab of Ornithology's free eBird website is another great way to explore birdlife anywhere on planet Earth, or just to find where interesting birds are being seen near you. Click on the EXPLORE link on the eBird home page. This gives you many different ways to find out about birds.

The next screen offers a choice of Explore Species or Explore Regions.

**Explore Species**—Typing in a bird's name opens a page offering a variety of resources about the selected species, including photographs and videos, and a brief life history, plus links to other Cornell sites. The range map displays the full range of the species in purple, but if you select Large Map, and then keep enlarging the map, eventually the purple coloration disappears, and instead you see small balloons indicating exact locations where the species has been seen (sightings within the last 30 days are shown in red). Also, click on the



*White-winged Scoters in north Alabama were seen by multiple birders after reports were posted on the ALBirds and eBird websites. (Peter Pearsall/U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)*

link for the weekly Bar Charts, to see exactly when the species is found throughout the year at whatever location you designate—either the state, county, or even at a particular “hotspot.” This is a great way to look for a particular species.

**Explore Regions**—Typing in the name of a county and state (e.g. Jefferson, Alabama), or even a specific hotspot will give you a variety of ways to learn where to find birds in that region. You can read a list of the recent sightings in the region you selected, or you can see lists of the region’s best birders, or the region’s best hotspots. Remember that you can click on the date of any checklist and see the complete checklist, and also get detailed directions to the location where the birds were seen.

**eBird Alerts**—eBird Alerts are another important way to keep abreast of the best birding opportunities near you. To register for Alerts, scroll down on the Explore screen to the link labelled Alerts. Here you can sign up for a variety of different alerts, delivered either daily or hourly as you choose. The Rare Bird Alert for Alabama sends you a list in your email (daily is often enough for me) of all of the unusual sightings reported to eBird from anywhere in Alabama. Here is a typical entry, about the same White-winged Scoters, posted by Rick Kittinger a few days after Damien Simbeck’s ALBirds report:

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (*Melanitta deglandi*) (2)

—Reported Nov 04, 2020 14:11 by Rick Kittinger

—Cypress Creek WTP, Lauderdale, Alabama

—Map: <http://maps.google.m/?ie=UTF8&t=p&z=13&q=34.7809587,-87.7054024&ll=34.7809587,-87.7054024>

—Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S75829377>

—Comments: “Continuing. Pics taken.”

Click on the map link to find exactly where the birds were seen. When you do that, note

the box on the left side of the screen includes a link for Directions, which connects you to Google Maps for voice directions to guide you to the exact location! If you click on the Checklist link, you can see the complete list of birds reported by the birder at that location.

Using these internet tools has revolutionized my birding activities. I’m actually doing a lot more birding, inspired by reading the daily reports from eBird and ALBirds. My birding trips now are being guided by some of Alabama’s best birders--and I’m very grateful to them all.

**About eBird**—More than 100 million bird sightings are contributed to eBird each year by eBirders around the world. A collaborative enterprise with hundreds of thousands of users, eBird is revolutionizing the study of birds for professional ornithologists and amateur birders alike. Alabama birders were slow to start reporting to eBird about the rich and varied birdlife of our beautiful state. But in recent years, thanks to an effort led by AOS member Ken Hare, reporting from nearly all 67 counties has greatly increased. This is important, because the huge eBird data base is being used to determine locations for scientific study and conservation. Another important benefit of using eBird is that every checklist you submit is carefully preserved in your own file on eBird, where powerful tools are available to help you analyze your data. If you are going to use eBird to find birds, you should also be contributing your own observations to eBird. The eBird app, easily downloaded (free) onto your cell phone, makes the process of filing your checklists really easy.

## BOOK REVIEW

## Mrs. Moreau's Warbler: How Birds Got Their Names

Stephen Moss, Guardian Faber, 2018

By MICHAEL RUSSELL



O, I HADN'T HEARD OF IT EITHER, BUT APPARENTLY it was a fascination with this name in the pre-Wikipedia days of 1970 that induced author Stephen Moss, who later worked in the BBC Natural History Unit, to develop an interest in the origins of bird names that led to this delightful book. Of course we have all heard of Bewick's Wren, Wilson's Warbler (and Snipe), Ross's Goose (and Gull), Steller's Jay (and Eider), Swainson's Hawk (Thrush and Warbler), to name but a few of the 51 men mentioned by Moss. But who were these men? And typically of those earlier days, almost

all of them were men, making Mrs. Moreau's (or Winifred's) Warbler (*Scepomycter winifredae*) something of an exception. Lady Amherst's Pheasant is another gorgeous stand-out, while Princess Stephanie's *Astrapia* sounds delightfully intriguing! It turns out, as explained in the book's prologue, that Reginald Moreau was an ornithologist who spent much of his life in Africa, and in 1938

was working at a biological research station in northeastern Tanganyika (now Tanzania). On an expedition to the Uluguru Mountains with his wife, Winifred, also an enthusiastic ornithologist, they discovered this rare and vulnerable species in the family Cisticolidae and at first assigned to the genus *Artisornis* (Moreau 1938).

Of course many bird names owe their origins to country folk who observed them in their daily activities and named them from obvious characteristics, like Blackcap, Redstart, from its red tail (*steort* being an Old English word for tail),

or Wheatear, actually a corruption of "white-arse" ("ass" in American English) from its conspicuous white rump patch. Moss traces many traditional names, such as goose, auk, swan, and swallow, back to their origins in early European languages. Later these names were carried over into the New World as European colonists began to record the often quite different species found here, but somehow reminding them of the avifauna in the Old World. Thus successive chapters trace the various influences on bird names over the centuries during which these evolved. As taxonomy became better organized and ornithology became established as a scientific discipline, so names became formalized, although as we are well aware, revisions, lumps, and splits still occur, especially now in light of new genetic findings.

Moss writes extremely well and with considerable humor, making this book both entertaining and informative. I should probably raise a caution for those of a more sensitive disposition (and possibly young children), as in places Moss's sense of humor descends to a more earthy tone.

Moss eventually made it to the Uluguru Mountains in 2017, but as he indicates at the end of the prologue, you will have to read the epilogue to find out if he actually got to see Mrs. Moreau's Warbler.

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

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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.

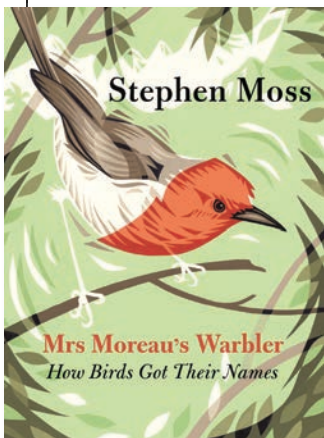
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IN MEMORIAM

*Bill McAllister*

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BILL MCALLISTER DIED RATHER SUDDENLY APRIL 18 IN Panama City, Florida. Bill was a well-known member of the birding community of North Alabama and beyond. He was a long-time member and trip planner/leader for the North Alabama Birdwatchers Society (NABS), as well as other bird counts and surveys; he was an excellent birder



and always generous sharing his knowledge. As a faithful member of AOS, Bill attended many meetings over the years, where he shared some of his always beautiful and interesting bird photos during our Friday night potlucks and mixers. After retirement Bill became an active member of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, where he taught numerous birding courses, including a popular spring course, Birding in Your Own Backyard, that was taught from his home. Bill and his wife Linda also enjoyed contra dance on weekends and traveled together extensively. He was certainly in his element when he passed, with Linda by his side, down enjoying the natural wonders, particularly in St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, one of his favorite places to be.

One of Bill's greatest joys was his love of outdoor photography, which was a lifelong pursuit, from which he derived great satisfaction through increased knowledge of bird identification and behavior, as well as making him more sensitive to other aspects of nature. He always loved sharing his photos but also, in the best tradition of a teacher, using

them to share his considerable knowledge of birds, birding, and photography.

I met Bill about 40 years ago, as part of the Cave Spring count party for a Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Count, memorable mainly as one of the coldest Christmas Counts in refuge history. Bill was also a colleague at Alabama A&M University, where he spent the last 25 years of his career teaching community planning and doing environmental and social impact research.

Rufina and I are going to miss Bill a lot. He was, in the truest sense of the word, a gentleman and a scholar, not to mention a great colleague, friend, and companion over the years, during many wonderful birding and nature adventures. Rest in peace, Bill.

—Ken Ward

EDITOR'S NOTE: *It is a sad fact that our members die. We would like to honor each one appropriately in The Yellowhammer. To do that we must know about the loss, so please notify the editor, treasurer, or membership chair if you are aware of the loss of one of our friends.*

## AOS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

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

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AOS is a 501(c)(3) organization.

Federal EIN: 63-1229959

**THE YELLOWHAMMER**

VOLUME 41, NO. 2 • SUMMER 2021

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 DESIGN.....Robin McDonald  
 ILLUSTRATIONS.....Annabel Markle

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*The Yellowhammer*, the newsletter of the Alabama Ornithological Society, is published four times a year. Editorial Office: 88838 Tallassee Highway, Tallassee, AL 36078. Send articles to be considered for publication to: BobReed1987@gmail.com. Subscriptions to *The Yellowhammer* and *Alabama Birdlife* are included in the AOS annual membership dues. Single copies \$2.00. Complimentary copies available for review and promotional purposes.

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Annual Membership:  
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