

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 43, NO. 3 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY FALL 2023

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

FOUNDED 1952



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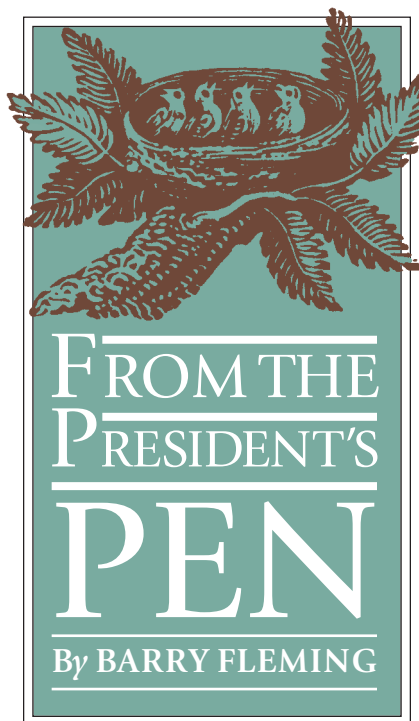
MEETINGS

Patsy Russo
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THIS BEING MY LAST PRESIDENT'S Pen, I feel fortunate to bask in the glow of the good things that have been happening with AOS and the promise of even better things to come. The one word that comes before others summarizing the past two years for me is *Joy*. That is a big part of birding to me anyway, but I'll remember forever many special little and large *Joy*s I witnessed in the last two years. The job itself may have at times been fraught with difficulty, but I always enjoyed observing the people as much as the birds, and AOS has many fine people who amplify and spread a whole lot of joy.

Birding is booming, expanding in bird-associated interests that bring people together and increasing in the traditional types of people drawn to birding. AOS is positioned very well to lead this new "birdscape" into the future. Alabama's place as a leader in numbers and diversity of species of plants and animals, wide geographic ranges, micro habitats, mild climate, and friendly and safe birding locations is unchallenged east of the Mississippi River. Alabama is a place of discovery for many in our nation and for some who live in the state. For this reason, I predict our numbers will continue to grow. As AOS serves as liaison between the birds and people, with a focus on bird education and research, stewardship and conservation, the organization will remain especially cognizant of new frontiers and the winds of change.

One reason I'm positive and encouraged about the future of AOS is due to our next leader, Drew Haffenden. He is an international bird guide, assists Alabama Audubon with bird research on the coast and is a resident of our society's favorite island, the Isle of Dauphin. Most days you will find him walking barefoot on the white sands of Dauphin Island taking notes on the birds. His fieldtrips and workshops on shorebirds are known for focusing on behavior first, then field marks. Whether it's bird knowledge or his sly sense of humor, I'd listen to every word he says. I have a lot of fun around Drew, and you will too. And remember, he needs your help. So don't wait for him to ask, send him a message as you feel so moved.



It's hard to believe that two years ago we were still shut down by a pandemic. The first winter meeting during my presidency, after the venue was booked and *The Yellowhammer* was about to be published, we had to cancel the meeting due to one last Covid spike. After not having a few meetings, I wondered if the vigor and size of meetings would take a while to regain, but the first spring meeting back, with the help of the subject, Operation Migration, where Whooping Cranes were led through Alabama behind ultralight planes to form the eastern population, members demonstrated a strong return to communal birding.

The speakers and subjects of meetings since have been varied and diverse. It was a Canadian that spoke about flying with the cranes, and a south Texan who broke the lower 48 Big Year record spoke on the adventure and challenges facing a young woman on such a quest. It was a Minnesotan, with an educational stay in Alabama, that took us deep into bird behavior by talking about pishing. And for the celebration Year of Alabama Birding, we engaged two big hitters from AOS itself. Dwight Cooley and Scot Duncan were the invited keynote speakers.

Many new members have joined the society in the last two years. I wish I could meet each and every one of you. To handle the growing popularity of birding and rising numbers of members, we will be needing more folks to participate in leadership positions. See the article in this Yellowhammer and get with me (flemiba@auburn.edu) or Drew (andrew@natssp.com) if you can help. We will continue to have needs in the area of food and set-up of meetings, media management, and writing, in addition to the positions listed.

The Alabama Year of Birding continues through 2024, so keep a watch for upcoming activities. Society members Drew Haffenden, Joe Watts, Anne G. Miller, Kenneth Ward, and Barry Fleming were featured in mini documentaries intended to promote birding and tourism out of state. They can be viewed on YouTube under Bird Tales.

The Alabama Birding Trails program has received quite a lift by Alabama Tourism. There are now State Birding Ambassadors.

sadors and committees set up in each of the eight regional divisions within the state. It would be great if you could familiarize yourself with the birding trails in your region and keep an eye out for problems that may arise, for example if a gate is locked or a trail is blocked by fallen trees or if the place description has changed. And keep those eBird records on birding trail locations coming.

The National Geographic TV Show, *Extraordinary Birders: Alabama*, with Christian Cooper, aired in July on NatGeo Wild, but may be streamed anytime on Disney+ or Hulu. It features several AOS members as co-stars with Mr. Cooper. Although their timing and focus did not permit including the

mountains and the coast, I believe it does a good job showing the ecological and geographical diversity of the state. I hope viewers see intelligent, well-adjusted, passionate Alabama people going about their daily bird work without pretense or agenda, and being happy about it.

Thanks to all members, the board, and those that helped with the AOS spring meeting, including the very successful silent auction. The meeting room at the Shelby Center was packed full of energized birders at the spring meeting, but the good news is they have a few more chairs we didn't use. So, plan now for the fall meeting, October 13–15 on Dauphin Island.

Join the AOS Team!



THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY WORKS because so many people work, for the birds, for the joy of birding, and for each other.

Two very important jobs—notice I didn't say positions—are treasurer and field trip coordinator. Both are critical for the success of the organization.

The treasurer has four main duties:

- Receive annual dues. Most come through PayPal, but some come in the mail with checks;
- Maintain the membership list. This is not a difficult task; but it does require that it be kept up to date. The list is kept on a laptop that goes with the job, in an Excel spreadsheet, already formatted and ready to go;
- Pay bills and keep records of the society's money. This is also not a difficult task. Money comes in via checks and PayPal, with monthly statements from both. We also have a certificate of deposit that basically just sits there; and
- Receive registrations from members for the meetings and man, with help, the registration table at the meetings where you will distribute name tags, most of which already exist, but hopefully you will have new members for whom you have to prepare new tags.

Between meetings, this all takes about two hours a month; however, in the four or five weeks prior to each meeting it can

be steady, perhaps an hour or more per day. Again, the secret is to stay on top of it. The current acting treasurer is an octogenarian, and this duty needs to be passed along while it can be done in an orderly manner. As of this writing, the records are in perfect shape; all the successor needs to do is pick it up.

The job of field trip coordinator is a bit easier. The duties consist of:

- Determining what field trips are available or expected. This is a given for the spring and fall Dauphin Island meeting, except if there is a rare opportunity to see a bird or other interesting thing such as the pitcher plant bog. This is a bit more fluid for the winter meeting. Regardless of the location, there are more or less established field trips for each winter spot. Additionally, there are always members with particular expertise for each locale that are always happy to help identify interesting field trips; and
- Arrange for field trip leaders. You do not have to lead trips, only coordinate those who do. Most society members are perfectly willing to lead a group, but most of them will not volunteer; they want to be asked.

Neither of these jobs is terribly difficult, and both are critical to the success of the society. Please consider volunteering for one of them as soon as possible.

Contact Barry Fleming (flemiba@auburn.edu) or Drew Haffenden (andrew@natsp.com) to join the team.

AOS Lifetime Achievement Award Recipients for 2023

By MICHELLE REYNOLDS

DURING THE SPRING ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL Society meeting, Bob and Lucy Duncan, my mother, Linda Reynolds, and I sat together. When Barry Fleming announced the recipients of the Lifetime Achievement Award, I think Lucy and I had to repeat it to my mom and to Bob. It was a surprised and slow reaction. "What? Really? Did I hear that right? All right!" High fives ensued. Then Barry said, "We'll be celebrating them for the whole year." The next day, at compilation, Bob asked me what Barry said about the length of celebration time. I told him he has the whole year. He said with a single clap, "Just a year? I want five!" I feel like I have been celebrating Bob and Lucy ever since I met them, and along with my mom, and I'm sure everybody else as well, we think the world of the Duncans. I think my mom is pretty great too, and I'm glad I got to sit at the "cool people" table at the AOS event. I'm happy to celebrate the achievements and ongoing accomplishments and excellence of these three nature super heroes.

BOB and LUCY DUNCAN

I KNEW SCOT DUNCAN BEFORE I MET LUCY AND BOB, AND I heard plenty of stories of Scot and his brother growing up on the coastal bay paradise of Gulf Breeze, Florida. By Scot's descriptions of his parents, I was able to identify them during a chance meeting at the east end of Dauphin Island. My husband, Bob, and I were riding our bikes to the fort when a minivan passed us on the narrow road leading to the parking lot. As soon as the van stopped in the far corner, a woman jumped out, and pointing in the air, she exclaimed excitedly, "There's a Peregrine Falcon right there!" A young couple jumped out of the sliding side door and followed her into the grass and headed towards the big dune. The man moved slower, calmly exited the vehicle, methodically

gathered his binoculars, a notebook, and was in the middle of his routine when we reached him. "Are you Scot Duncan's parents? You have to be," I said shyly. He turned slowly. "I'll admit to that. I'm Bob and that's Lucy," he said dryly.

Over the years, I couldn't be sure if he ever remembered my name, but he now knows me as the one who loves Loggerhead Shrikes. Come to think of it, he associates a lot of people with birds, and as someone who remembers plant names better than people names, I like that. Barry Fleming is the guy who found that Say's Phoebe, and Lee Brewer was the gal who spotted the Florida Scrub Jay during an AOS/FOS field trip to Florida. If you ever find a rare bird and Bob hears about it, he will forever tie you to that bird's name as well.

You've surely heard of Bob's weather forecasts during bird migration. He is a keen weatherman. He'll study weather patterns—headwinds and tailwinds, cold fronts, wind direction and velocity, high- or low-pressure systems, and squall lines—all factors affecting bird movements during migration. With radar, weather apps and websites, tracking conditions and shifting winds, he can find out whatever is happening in the Southern Gulf, make predictions for the bird movements, and determine whether or not we will get a good fallout or a trickle onto the Northern Gulf Coasts. His knowledge and accurate predictions led him to write his first booklet, *Bird Migration, Weather and Fallout*. This book is also included in *The Birds of Escambia, Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Counties Florida with Bird Migration, Weather and Fallout* by both Bob and Lucy.

Bob and Lucy have written numerous scientific articles on birds for Alabama and Florida Ornithological Society special publications and for several national publications as well. Their field trip stories and bird reports frequently appear in *The Yellowhammer* and in their local Audubon chapter newsletter. They are both accomplished writers, speakers, educators, trip leaders, and active members of groups supporting environmental education, bird habitat conservation, and land preservation—cross-pollinating and collaborating

at every opportunity. Both have served on the Alabama Bird Records Committee (as well as the FOS Records Committee), and have found several Alabama firsts including the Short-tailed Hawk, Inca Dove, Razorbill, Yellow Wagtail, Black Swift, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and the Lesser Nighthawk.

Lucy believes in keeping lists no matter the level of the birder—any bird can spark interest anywhere at any time. She encourages folks to watch the birds at home from a window or while out and about. Observe, note, learn, and keep adding to the knowledge base. A spark can become a lifelong passion. In 1967, a few Common Grackles landed in the yard while she was swinging under the oak tree. The bowing and lifting behavior by the iridescent black-birds triggered her interest and moved her to go into town and buy a bird book. It took three books before finding a note in a Peterson guide reading, “If you are interested in birds, join us for the Thursday meetings.” She started counting birds then, and she and Bob have been serious birders ever since. They have 302 species on their yard bird list! It helps they live in the middle of a migrant trap!

A retired elementary school teacher (once a teacher, always a teacher), enthusiasm is Lucy’s superpower, and her sense of awe and wonder help her connect to others and build community. Even though Lucy is an expert birder, she has the ability to put people at ease and meet them where they are in their level of understanding of the natural world, and she encourages folks to learn in their own way. She has taught many, but considers her sons, Scot and Will, her best contribution to the birds and to environmental education and conservation.

LINDA REYNOLDS

THE ALABAMA TOURISM DEPARTMENT HAS DECLARED THE YEAR of Alabama Birding. My mother, Linda Reynolds, knows a thing or two about ecotourism and the importance of outdoor recreation (and birdwatching in particular) to the state’s economy. She started the Eagle Awareness Program at Lake Guntersville State Park in 1985. Back then, eagle visitors were scarce during the winter months. The park



AOS Lifetime Achievement recipients Lucy and Bob Duncan made their many significant contributions to the knowledge of Alabama birds despite living in Florida. (Scot Duncan)

superintendent was skeptical at first that the program would even draw a crowd when she told him she wanted to begin the day at five o’clock in the morning. She had already been leading trips to see the eagles, and when she told him about the glee people felt when seeing the big birds leave the roost and soar into the sunrise, he decided an eagle watch program was a good idea.

In the early eighties, the Reynolds family volunteered in the state park clearing and maintaining trails. My mom always said our activities in the park were cheap entertainment for a family of six. Trail work built character, fostered a conservation ethic and love of nature. If we weren’t trail building, we were hiking, learning about the flora and fauna,



AOS Lifetime Achievement recipient and past president Linda Reynolds started the Eagle Awareness Program in Guntersville, among many significant achievements. (Michelle Reynolds)

and exploring the geology and the historical features of the park. While we worked, we witnessed wintering Bald Eagles, feeding along Short Creek during the day and roosting on Town Creek at night. After years of leading education programs, field trips, and special projects as a volunteer, the park offered Linda a paying job as State Park Naturalist, and gave her the opportunity to expand the Naturalist Program for the Alabama State Parks. The eagles helped push her career along. Create a program, and they will come.

For the first year, she planned seven field trips, an afternoon program, and a dinner. 500 people showed up for the day! She was thankful they didn't all come at once. From there, she decided she better spread out the program

over three weekends in January with the goal of increasing attendance and overnight occupancy at the lodge. She led three midweek programs as well. She collaborated with the Alabama Tourism Department to advertise in the Atlanta, Nashville, Birmingham markets and beyond. Tourism sent a bus of travel writers from across the country to help promote the new program. Very soon, it received an annual award from the Southeastern Tourism Association as one of the top ten January events. Eagle Awareness remains well attended to this day.

Using the state park as an outdoor classroom, Linda, teaching a variety of subjects from earth sciences, flora and fauna, history, and literature, set out to educate the youngest to the oldest. School groups would come to the park, and she visited classrooms in ten counties. She encouraged Associate Naturalists to collaborate in the collections for the Nature Center and to help take care of a variety of orphaned or injured animals. The kids in the campground kept her in a constant supply of baby possums, and the little critters made the best animal ambassadors. The Nature Center was a menagerie of curiosities on display.

Working with professors and biologists, guiding them to their field of studies, Linda has mentored many college students and interns who have gone on to be park superintendents, rangers, naturalists, teachers, ecologists, and outdoor professionals.

Past president of AOS, current board member of Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, compiler for Christmas Bird Count (Guntersville), she actively contributes to ornithological studies and projects, and is a continual resource for her local newspaper.

Bob, Lucy, and Linda are mentors to countless young naturalists, fledgling ornithologists and everyday birders, and they each believe wholeheartedly in the importance of starting kids early and encouraging adults from all walks of life. They work to instill understanding and compassion for wildlife and for wild places. They each continue to participate to ongoing ornithological studies. By observing and reporting, researching and monitoring, receiving and making calls, sharing and connecting, they are true community builders and are most deserving of this recognition.

Living With Giants

By GEOFF HILL



ONE OF THE MOST CONSPICUOUS BIRDS IN URBAN and suburban Alabama is the Canada Goose. It is hard to miss flocks of geese at cemeteries, office complexes, golf courses, parks, and essentially any patch of grass in towns and cities throughout much of Alabama. These honking, pooping nuisances are around every day of the year—despite a lingering perception of the Canada Goose as a migratory visitor from the north; nearly all Canada Geese observed in Alabama are resident.

For those of us whose Alabama birding experience extends back to the 1990s or before, we know that Alabama was not always full of Canada Geese. As a matter of fact, when I arrived in Alabama in 1993, a birder essentially never observed geese in the summer in Alabama, and Canada Geese were scarce even in the winter. What changed? Did migrating groups of geese decide it would be easier just to stay south and breed on golf courses instead of flying a thousand miles to the arctic? That sounds far-fetched, and indeed it is totally wrong.

The Canada Geese that migrate from the far north to the Eastern United States including Alabama, are either *Branta canadensis interior* (Hudson Bay Canada Goose) or *Branta canadensis canadensis* (Atlantic Canada Goose). These two subspecies are so similar they really should be combined into one subspecies. Before the 1990s, geese of these subspecies would arrive in Alabama in the late fall, winter primarily in a few spots in the state like Wheeler and Eufaula National Wildlife Refuges, and then fly back north in March. It was only a handful of flocks and a few thousand geese in the whole state. In contrast, the geese that are now resident throughout Alabama belong to the subspecies *Branta canadensis maxima*, the Giant Canada Goose. Ironically, this over-abundant urban nuisance bird was so rare in the middle of the twentieth century, that the Giant Canada Goose was widely believed to be extinct.

When European settlers pushed into the eastern center of North America, they noted a breeding population of a large Canada Goose that seemed to be present year-round. These large geese were reported as breeders in the Great Lakes region and North Great Plains south to Tennessee and Ar-

kansas. Because this was the southern-most nesting population of Canada Geese, whose habitat was the grasslands and bottomlands where people preferred to settle, it was quickly shot out of nearly its entire range, while migratory populations of the Canada Goose that nested north of human settlements remained a common bird. The Giant subspecies of the Canada Goose was so thoroughly extirpated from the United States and southern Canada that the subspecies was widely regarded by ornithologists and wildlife biologists as extinct by the 1930s. Indeed, the Giant Canada Goose may have been permanently added to the list of extirpated North American birds if it had not been for a very observant wildlife biologist named Harold Hanson, who drove through Rochester, Minnesota, every October on his return trip from a favorite fishing spot. He noticed that a flock of Canada Geese at Silver Lake Park in Rochester seemed to be both very large and very gray-backed compared to the individuals in the wintering flocks of Hudson Bay Canada Geese (*B. c. interior*) that he saw regularly in the winter near his home in Illinois. Hanson got in contact with Forrest Lee, a wildlife biologist at the Minnesota Department of Conservation, who was intrigued and agreed to investigate the Rochester geese with Hanson. In January 1962, on a day when “the temperature held around zero and a strong wind blew” Hanson, Lee, and a small team of biologists captured, weighed, measured, and banded some of the large mystery geese.

Right away Hanson knew he was on to something. The Silver Lake Park Geese were huge. As a matter of fact, the biologists thought their scale for weighing captured geese was faulty when they started recording weights of 20 pounds or more. To check their scale, one of the co-workers rushed over to a grocery store, bought a 5-pound bag of sugar and a 10-pound bag of flour, confirmed the weights of the baking

A Giant Canada Goose (Branta canadensis maxima) with goslings at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge in May 2010. Refuge personnel introduced Giant Canada Geese to Barbour County before the mid-1970s and there were numerous breeding geese when I first visited the refuge in 1993. (Geoff Hill)





A Giant Canada Goose family at Eufaula NWR. A breeding program brought the subspecies back from the brink of extinction to a current population of 5 to 6.5 million. (Geoff Hill)

supplies with the certified scale at the grocery store, and then put the items of known poundage on the goose scale. Their banding scale was as accurate as the certified scale at the grocery store. The geese they were banding really did weight 20 or more pounds—way bigger than birds in the Hudson Bay or Atlanta Canada Goose populations. The Silver Lake Park birds were Giant Canada Geese. Hanson confirmed the identity of the Rochester, Minnesota, birds with his measurements and through consultation with leading taxonomists like Alexander Wetmore. Hanson then set out to find other remnant populations of the Giant Canada Goose. He found small populations of Giant Canada Geese, primarily maintained on game farms and as decoy stock, in Manitoba, Illinois, Iowa, North and South Dakota, Wisconsin, and even in a park in Denver.

Hanson's discovery of Giant Canada Geese created a bit of a sensation in the waterfowl biology world. A resident Canada Goose presented all sorts of potential for a new game bird and was a welcome addition to refuge bird lists. Also, the wild population of Giant Canada Geese was so small that propagating individuals on refuges seemed the only way to save the subspecies. So, eggs were collected, the Giant Canada

Goose was propagated at federal wildlife centers, and the birds were released at refuges all over the eastern United States, even outside the original range of the bird. Initially, the Giant Canada Goose was thought to need extensive wetland habitat, away from human activities. They were not considered an urban bird. However, the potential for Giant Canada Geese to adapt to human environments was foretold (or maybe forewarned is the better way to put it) by Hanson in his book *The Giant Canada Goose*: "The ready acceptance of nesting Giant Canada Geese to joint occupation of the land with humans and their tolerance of human activity are indicative of the great potential that exists for increasing the over-all populations of

this race." If only Hanson could visit some urban parks in the twenty-first century, overrun with hundreds of geese.

Birdlife International gives the current population of Canada Geese in North America as between 5 and 6.5 million birds with the population growing 100% per decade. There are now far more Giant Canada Geese in North America than geese in all other subspecies combined. Breeding populations extend from Southern Canada to Tampa, Florida, Austin, Texas, and San Diego, California, and Giant Canada Geese are steadily increasing in Alabama. In *Alabama Birds*, Imhof notes a resident, pinioned flock of Giant Canada Geese at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge, as the only breeding Canada Geese in the state in 1976. The first June/July eBird record for Canada Goose in my home county, Lee County (Auburn/Opelika), was in 2014 by Larry Gardella doing Breeding Atlas Surveys. This summer in Auburn, Canada Goose is listed on numerous eBird tallies, and there are hundreds of Canada Geese breeding in every part of the county. This scenario is playing out in counties all over the state. Love them or hate them, the Giants are here to stay.

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INNER WORKINGS OF THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TV SHOW

"Extraordinary Birder: Alabama"

By BARRY FLEMING

I GOT A CALL FROM SCOT DUNCAN OF ALABAMA Audubon suggesting I might get a call about a TV show being shot in Alabama because I had helped show an endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker to Christian Cooper, the star of the show, on his first trip to Alabama a year before.

They called. Mostly I spoke with three or four producers and directors from NYC and LA over several weeks on Zoom. The first question I asked them, like we do in Alabama, was, "When are y'all coming?" They said it would be the last week of July. I tried to convince them, on video remember, that they couldn't have picked a better time to come to Alabama. And they came.

The time frame and birds they were after dictated they work in the central part of the state, east to west. They asked about lodging. Coming from large metropolitan areas they assumed Birmingham or Montgomery, but I said, "Oh no, you're staying in Opelika." And they did.

Although I don't watch TV, one fine memory is when I somehow convinced these big shot TV producers to let us place a gray rat snake in the empty Wood Duck box so there would be some TV excitement when we opened it. I remember the Zoom meeting when they were asking about obtaining extra insurance for the snake. I told them we had just witnessed two four-foot long timber rattlesnakes copulating along the trail to the Wood Duck boxes, and if they had enough insurance to cover that, I felt like it would be enough to cover the nonvenomous reptile. It seemed the whole Zoom meeting froze up for a minute there.

I met three of the directors—two from LA, one from NYC—in Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge after they drove down from the Atlanta Airport on a scalding day. I pointed to where they were to catch and band a loggerhead shrike with Eric Soehren and Rashidah Farid and instructed them to follow me through dirt roads into Macon County where Mark Bailey would be waiting to discuss endangered woodpeckers. I told them we would likely be the only ones on these roads and handed a boiled peanut kit, with Cajun-flavored boiled peanuts, a bag with wet paper towels, and a bag for shells, to the guy in the back seat, and we tore off. I had no idea if any of the three had even heard of the wet goober pea.

In addition to starring as the host of Extraordinary Birder, Renaissance man Christian Cooper is a science writer, and a writer and editor for Marvel Comics, for whom he has created a number of original characters. (Wikimedia Commons)



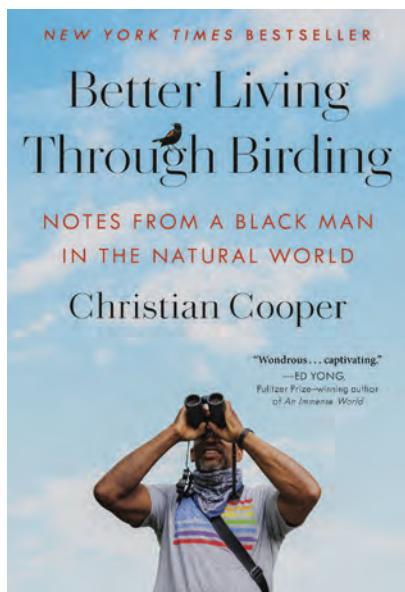
There was also an exciting moment when our handler of the snake, a wild-life professor from Auburn who was not wearing waders, was attached by leaches. The health and safety person on the scene barked off union rules and my friend was ushered away to a suitcase, treated with three ointments and paperwork was filled out.

I can't tell you how hard these people worked those seven days. The days were long, but they also enjoyed the area at night. The woman handling organization, who didn't get an inch off the trail, told me she eats well in NYC most nights, and that's her hobby just as birding was mine. She reported that every restaurant

I had recommended to her in the area was excellent. Several packed up bottles of the first legal Alabama whiskey since prohibition, distilled downtown, with notes of peach and pecan.

The last night of their trip I suggested they might want to all get together for one final celebratory meal at the Waverly Local, an excellent restaurant in a nearby town of 150 residents. After hours of dining, including all appetizers, twelve of us were the only ones left in the place. We shut down Opelika at Rock and Roll Pinball after we shut down the Local. Gathered around the last two vehicles in town, my white truck, and their white van, we hugged, slapped backs, and they swore this was the favorite state they had visited. I ran to my truck to retrieve a five pound bag of green peanuts the director in the back seat that first day had later asked for. He was somewhat surprised by the size of the bag and the rich, musty, alive smell. He asked, "Should I put them in a bag?" Knowing he had to get on a plane in five hours, I said, "No, just put them in the overhead." I don't know if they confiscated those peanuts on principal, but I like to imagine a plane from Georgia all the way to California full of the smell of rich Alabama soil.

This represents well what I often notice, that when folks visit from far away locations with understandable preconceived notions of Alabama, once they get here and meet the people and see the place, the smile on their face seems to increase in scale the longer they stay. I think the episode shows to the world competent and happy Alabamians working pas-



In 2023, Random House published Christian Cooper's bestselling memoir *Better Living Through Birding: Notes from a Black Man in the Natural World*. (Random House)

sionately for the birds. Here is Christian Cooper's statement he sent to me:

"New Yorkers like me sometimes think we live in the bright center of the universe, but traveling for *Extraordinary Birder* has been eye-opening in more ways than just getting a chance to see new birds like Red-cockaded Woodpecker! It's brought me to places like Opelika—so different than New York but, like my hometown, it's full of life—

from the seemingly countless Wood Ducks to the amazing people. I still think New York City is the bright center of the universe (hey, I'm still a New Yorker!), but I'm learning fast that there are places like Opelika, where there may not be the lights of Broadway, but where light shines even more brightly."

Christian stated on Terry Gross' *Fresh Air*, NPR show that he felt the Alabama episode was the most important, and that he hopes they did the state proud. Well, I for one think they did.

Thanks to all the society members that helped, in front of the camera or behind, like Michelle Reynolds who was frantically driving around looking for fresh shrike larder on barbed wire. The episode may be viewed on Disney+ or Hulu at your convenience.

AOS Winter Meeting Speaker Preview

OUR SPEAKER FOR THE AOS WINTER MEETING IS AMAR AYYASH, probably the best known and one of the top gull experts in the US. Amar will be presenting a gull workshop Friday evening, leading our Saturday outing, including visiting the Tennessee River's best gull areas, especially Wilson Dam, and he will be our speaker Saturday night. Gulls are notoriously difficult for many birders so this is a hands-on opportunity to learn with an expert who can make gulling fun. —Drew Haffenden

A Mixed Bag Nesting Season

IT HAS BEEN A MIXED BAG IN the Reed bird nursery this year. We have had one, and probably two broods of Tufted Titmice. They have been interesting to watch as they learned how to eat the Martha Sargent suet from the hanging suet log. When they light on the log, they often come in a little “hot” and set the log to spinning. They hang tight until they can get to the holes with the suet, eat, and run.

Immature black-billed Northern Cardinals are still being fed by the male, while the female is presumably sitting on another brood.

We discouraged the Eastern Pheobe from building on the front porch, strictly because of the mess left behind in recent years. It worked—sorta. Instead, they built over the bedroom window on a ledge no wider than 1.25 inches. As soon as they fledged, to show us what they thought of our feeble and unwelcome attempts to save the porch, they promptly left, only to reappear a month later.

We had a clutch of five baby Carolina Wrens in the box about eight inches from the back door. They got accustomed to our coming and going, and Pat would talk to “her” babies every trip. On the night before we expected them to fledge, a gray rat snake ate them all. I caught him in the act and tried, unsuccessfully, to intervene. I relocated the snake, but not before I beat the devil out of him with Pat’s fertilizer stir-stick, trying to get his head out of the nest box.

The wrens wasted no time in building a nest in the garage. Regrettably, I removed not one, but four partial nests. Then I had surgery, leaving me unable to drive the truck for several days. When I drove back into the yard the first time and backed it into the carport, there was a very agitated wren hopping around the bed. Unbeknownst to me, they had built up against the tailgate. I didn’t touch the truck for several days,



except to watch to see if they returned to the nest, which they did, but then, for some reason they abandoned it a day or two later. Perhaps they could sense that the egg—there was only one—had failed because of the truck’s absence. I felt terrible about it. Two failures plus so many started nests.

I have seen, in late July, the wrens still collecting nesting material.

The Eastern Bluebirds had built in the bluebird house, and all was well. I put Snake-A-Way around the post to deter any more predators. It almost worked. Another gray rat snake made it up to the box, but seemed dazed or confused by the powder. He did not eat the birds, who were nearing fledging. They all escaped and dispersed around the yard, with both parents guarding (when our little yorkie got too close to one of the babies, papa bluebird dive-bombed him) and feeding them. At least one of the birds survived.

On the plus side, we have seen one juvenile Red-bellied Woodpecker on the pine tree, and white juvenile Little Blue Herons in the ponds. The Green Heron pair nested somewhere near, but I never found the nest, nor have I observed any young.

The Brown-headed Nuthatch pair fledged three young, and brought them to all three suet feeders, as have (probably) two nestings of House Finches.

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Winter 2023	November 10, 2023
Spring 2024	February 10, 2024
Summer 2024	May 10, 2024

North Alabama Young Birders Club: The Fledgling Year

By AVA LYERLY



THE NORTH ALABAMA YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB (NAYBC) is geared toward any young bird enthusiast in North Alabama from ages 7-17.

The purpose of the club is to bring young birders together, to provide a forum of peers that enhances the young birders' experience. In addition to birding, we share information on conservation and resources that encourage birding in our generation. Our meetings are held in the Decatur (Alabama) Public Library Community Room, at 3:30 p.m. on the first Friday of every month. We have a great time enjoying in-depth discussions about birds and have monthly bird walks. In addition, we also recently had our first NAYBC Game Day, when we gathered for dueling games of Wingspan.

We held our first monthly meeting in January 2023, and now average 10 attendees. Each meeting has a central focus, whether it's on an individual species that might be struggling (such as the Red-headed Woodpecker, the topic of our August meeting), conservation, bird ID, habitat, or birding in general. Many of the topics are current happenings in the birding world drawn from articles published by Cornell, Audubon, and American Birding Association. We share our sightings and ask questions about birds/bird ID (NAYBC original game "What's That Bird?"). At the end of each meeting, we play a quick bird ID game with flashcards. It's always an exciting hour with new friends. The goal is to host seasoned birders, ornithologists, and biologists who will make presentations at our monthly club meetings. We are so excited to host Barry Fleming via Zoom at our September meeting to share insights from his years in the birding community and conservation.

During our monthly bird walks, we visit local hotspots and focus on a target species (i.e., Whooping Cranes, Purple Martins, Common Gallinule, warblers, etc.), or participate in trail cleanups to pick up trash or clear overgrown trails. The most exciting part is being surrounded by birds, learning,

and experiencing the joy of birdwatching. NAYBC has been invited twice to the Biddle Farm in Albertville, which is one of two Purple Martin banding (federal bands and geolocators) stations in Alabama.

Recently, NAYBC was invited to the Oakville Indian Mounds Park and Museum in Danville; a hidden treasure in North Alabama. It hosts a large pond, open fields, acres of wooded areas, and miles of trails. There are many species and lots of great habitats for birds. The park is celebrating the Year of Alabama Birding by hosting its first Oakville Feather Fest, March 9, 2024. The event will include various birdhouse/craft booths, lessons in birding for the casual 'birdwatcher' and guided bird walks (conducted by yours truly), as well as sessions on photography tips and more. Watch their Facebook page for more info.

The next generation of birders is important to ensure that the youth of today care not only about birds, but care about the environment and the connection between ecosystems and our effect on it all. We are the ones who will carry the future of birding. Together, we can change apathy into an attitude of interest and love for nature. For more information call/text 615-631-3849 or cclyerly@gmail.com.

Happy birding!

Upcoming Meetings

FALL MEETING—October 13–15, 2023

Dauphin Island, Alabama

WINTER MEETING—January 26–28, 2024

Joe Wheeler State Park

SPRING MEETING—April 19–21, 2024

Dauphin Island, Alabama

AOS Helping Alabama Birding Trails

YOU MAY HAVE READ THE ALBIRDS REQUEST I MADE FOR AOS members to volunteer to update and correct write-ups for the Alabama Birding Trails (alabamabirdingtrails.com). Several people have responded, and I have already reviewed one proposed new description. By the time you read this, I hope to have received several more.

Joe Watts is working on improving the descriptions for all the sites on the eight Alabama Birding Trails, and he welcomes help from the Alabama Ornithological Society. He "would love any and all contributions to improve the site to make it more helpful to birders." Although he would have liked this project to be finished in August or early September, there is still time to make changes that will make the trail site descriptions more helpful to birders. What better time than now, during Alabama's two-year-long Year of the Birds?

Do you often bird at one or more of the many great birding sites on the Alabama Birding Trails? If so, would you be willing to use your knowledge of the site to help improve its online description?

If you are interested in working on a write-up for one of the sites, please start by reading over the existing description online. What can you add about the kinds of birds to expect at the site - and where? There isn't room for a list of every bird ever seen at the site. It doesn't help to list a megararity seen once at the site but unlikely ever to be seen again. Instead, think of birds commonly seen there and any special aspects of birding the site. You may want to add something about where at the site any highly desired birds are likely to appear.

If you want to work on one of the sites, please let Ken Hare (kmhare46@knology.net) or me (lfgardella@gmail.com) know. We have agreed to perform some editorial functions and be the conduit through which the content flows to Joe.

—Larry Gardella

The Yellowhammer is Going All-Digital

THE AOS IS SPENDING OVER \$3,400 ANNUALLY TO PRINT and mail *The Yellowhammer*. Next year it will cost even more. There are only approximately 115 members who still receive a print copy. That's over \$29 per account, while

individual dues are only \$25. That also does not count the expense of *Alabama BirdLife*, which will remain available in the print edition. The board of directors has made the difficult decision to pull the plug on this expense. That will free up more than \$3,400 for conservation, arranging for interesting speakers, and much more.

The digital newsletter is in full color, so that everyone can enjoy the stunning photos and the magnificent design.

Beginning with the spring 2024 Yellowhammer, only digital issues will be available. There are a few of you for whom we do not have a valid email address. It is imperative that we have a valid email address for all members. Please send them to the acting treasurer (patreed1987@gmail.com). We will share your email address with no one. Most email communications are sent out as blind copies so that even other members do not have access to email addresses.

The board understands and regrets that this will be an unpopular decision for some of you, but it simply does not make sense to continue to lose money on every newsletter that goes out.

The Yellowhammer will be available on the website, www.aosbirds.org, soon after each meeting. All registration, field trip, and schedule information will continue to be available on the website as soon as it is developed.

New Members

Sherrie Alexander

Annette Bittaker

Samuel and Ann Crosby

Ruby Hammond

Lisa Ogletree

Neil Raiford

Richard Sims

Michelle Zeeman

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

Gretchen McCorquodale

AOS FALL MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, OCTOBER 13-15, 2023

AOS Fall Meeting Schedule



UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL ACTIVITIES BEGIN or occur at the Shelby Center, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, 101 Bienville Boulevard, Dauphin Island, AL 36528; casual attire throughout.

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

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 6

6:00 p.m. AOS Board meeting: Via Zoom

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13

5:15 p.m. Registration/Social hour at Shelby Center, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

6:00 p.m. Member Social
Shrimp boil and sides. Monetary contributions are welcome.

6:45 p.m. Announcements/Discussion of Weekend Field Trips

7:00 p.m. Members Photography Show

8:00 p.m. Adjourn

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14

6:30 a.m. **Field Trips:**
Exploring Dauphin Island
with Scot Duncan and Barry Fleming
Where: Green Park (next to Ship & Shore)

Birds of Pelican Bay Peninsula
with Larry Gardella
Where: Public Beach and Pier parking lot

5:15 p.m. **Registration at Shelby Center,**
Dauphin Island Sea Lab

5:30 p.m. **Banquet and Keynote Speaker**
Shelby Center, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

5:30 p.m. Social Hour

6:30 p.m. Banquet Buffet

7:15 p.m. Annual Membership meeting
and election of officers

7:20 p.m. Announcements and Discussion
of Field Trips

7:30 p.m. **Keynote Speaker: Scot Duncan**

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15

6:30 a.m. **Field Trip**
Blakeley Island Mudlakes
with Larry Gardella
Where: Green Park (next to Ship & Shore)

Noon Compilation (Includes all bird sightings in
Mobile and Baldwin Counties from Friday,
October 13 to noon, October 15, 2023)
Where: Goat Trees

ACCOMMODATIONS AND INFORMATION

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

Websites:

www.gulfinfo.com

www.townofdauphinisland.org/where-to-stay

Motels:

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

Bed and Breakfast:

Dauphin Island Harbor House: 251-861-2119

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

Rentals:

Boardwalk Realty, Inc.: 877-861-3992

Tyson Real Estate: 800-865-8312

ACP Real Estate, Inc.: 866-861-3311

Camping:

Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board: 251-861-2742
(fully equipped for both camper and tent camping)

Fall Meeting Field Trips

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

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2023

EXPLORING DAUPHIN ISLAND

Trip Leader: Scot Duncan and Barry Fleming

Meeting Time: 6:30 a.m.

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

We'll bird the varied habitats of Dauphin Island with our Keynote Speaker starting at the airport for rails and sparrows, then to the Shell Mounds for warblers, vireos, tanagers and any other Neotropical migrants we can find. We'll check out the Audubon Sanctuary and other island hotspots, aided by the cellphone network of sightings by other birders on the island. Other than Audubon Sanctuary, which is a one mile circuit, there is not a lot of distance walked on this outing, though most of our time is spent on foot.

NOTE: It is important for all participants to meet at Green Park, and not arrive at the airport independently. Early airport arrivers can cause rails and sparrows to retreat into the marsh before the rest of the group arrives.

BIRDS OF PELICAN ISLAND

Trip Leader: Larry Gardella

Meeting Time: 6:30 a.m.

Meeting Place: Start of pier in the parking lot at Public Beach (next to school)

Join Larry Gardella to get to know the birds of Alabama's richest beach habitat, Pelican Island (formerly an island, now a peninsula). With an eBird count currently standing at 186 species, Pelican Island is exceptional for a strip of beach and dune 100-150 yards wide and just over 1.5 miles long at low tide. It's an easy walk on flat sand, and our distance

traveled depends on how close the birds are to the pier. The island is growing longer once again, and given the tide, the far end, which often has most of the birds, will be about 1 to 1.3 miles from the pier. Participants can return to their cars at any time. There'll be several spotting scopes for general use, which can quickly ramp up your shorebird ID skills.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2023

FIELD TRIP TO BLAKELEY ISLAND MUDLAKES

Trip Leader: Larry Gardella

Meeting Time: 6:30 a.m. for a departure at 6.45 a.m. sharp.

Meeting Place: Green Park (next to Ship & Shore). Parking is very limited at the Mudlakes so some car-pooling is necessary. Participants staying overnight off the island can meet at the Mudlakes. Please advise when signing up, and you will receive directions and start time.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This trip is planned, but for the last couple of Octobers bird activity has been very quiet at this usually very productive site. The site will be visited just a little before the trip, and if similarly quiet, a different outing may replace this one.

The Blakeley Island Mud Lakes are a complex of disposal ponds that attract large numbers of shorebirds and waterfowl. We'll carpool to the site and walk the dirt road up and along the dikes to view rows of ponds of varying depths. Expected birds are American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Stilt Sandpiper, and a variety of other shorebirds, as well as Gull-billed Tern, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, and raptors, often including Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Mississippi Kite and Northern Harrier. We'll return to Dauphin Island in time for compilation at noon. Walking distance is about two miles in the open with no shade. Terrain is good, level dirt road. Mosquitoes and biting flies may be present. If there has been recent rain places may be muddy. Once in the site participants must stay on the roads, not even going into the immediate vegetated verges. AOS and individuals could lose the hard-won permission to bird here if this occurs.

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

A O S FALL MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, OCTOBER 13–15, 2023

Meet the Speaker: Scot Duncan

Alabama's Birdlife and the Climate Crisis: Changes, Challenges, and Choices



ASK ANY LONG-TIME BIRDER IN THE SOUTHEASTERN United States about changes to the region's birdlife, and you will get an earful about how today is very different than it used to be. Most notably, there are fewer birds than there were just a handful of decades ago. Much of this change is due to legacy threats from last century that are still a burden to bird populations, especially habitat loss, pollution, building collisions, and invasive species and diseases. And now, nearly a quarter of the way through this new century, it is very apparent that birds are facing a new formidable threat—climate change.

The climate crisis is changing Alabama's birdlife faster than at any time in the past few thousand years. More heatwaves, stronger storms and floods, dangerous droughts and wildfires, and a disappearing coastline—the shifting climate is forcing changes to how birds are living in the Alabama landscape. If bird conservation organizations such as Alabama Ornithological Society and Alabama Audubon want to ensure that birds survive in this new era, we need to better understand how climate change is affecting birds. Only then can we promote the conservation strategies our birds need to survive.

Ornithologists are learning how birds are being affected by climate change. As you might expect, populations of many species are imperiled—some more than others. But it is encouraging that other species are showing signs of adapting to climate change. Yes, you read that correctly—many species are adjusting how and where they live to cope with the new climate. Think of the tropical and semi-tropical species or neotropical migrants that are expanding their ranges northward (e.g., Limpkin, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Northern Parula). Some bird species are even evolving new body shapes to cope with the changing climate.

In this talk I will summarize what ornithologists are learning about how climate change is affecting birds and how birds are responding. I will also highlight which Alabama

bird species are most vulnerable to climate change. I will share what Alabama Audubon is doing to help protect our birds and point out ways that everyone can contribute to ensuring that Alabama's amazing birdlife can survive and thrive this century and far beyond.

DR. R. SCOT DUNCAN became the executive director of Alabama Audubon in August 2022. He was raised on the shores of Pensacola Bay, Florida, by the celebrated birders and conservationists, Lucy and Bob Duncan. Both Scot and his brother, Will, have dedicated their lives to science, conservation, and education. Scot holds a BS in Biology from Eckerd College, and an MS and PhD in Zoology from the University of Florida. His research and explorations have taken him to Antarctica, New Zealand, East Africa, Central and South America, the Pacific Northwest, and ecosystems across the southeastern United States. For the past twenty years, Scot has focused his efforts on endangered species and ecosystems of the Southeast.

Scot is the author of the award-winning book *Southern Wonder: Alabama's Surprising Biodiversity*, foreword by Dr. Edward O. Wilson. Written for the layperson, the book interweaves the disciplines of ecology, evolution, and geology into an explanation of why Alabama is home to more species than any other state east of the Mississippi River. The book won the Phil Reed Environmental Writing Award for non-fiction from the Southern Environmental Law Center. More than 3,100 copies have been sold.

Scot's latest book, *Southern Rivers: Restoring America's Freshwater Biodiversity*, will be published in 2024. Scot is frequently interviewed by the press on issues of species and ecosystem conservation and climate change. He has delivered more than 120 talks to the public since 2013. He has a blog, entitled *Confluence: The Head and Heart of Southeastern Ecology*.

Scot is a professor emeritus at Birmingham-Southern College, where he taught for twenty years, serving as chair of the Biology Department from 2014 to 2017.

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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 _____

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Pat Reed, 88838 Tallassee Highway, Tallassee, AL 36078

Name(s) _____

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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**

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Complete and return to:

Pat Reed, 88838 Tallassee Highway, Tallassee, AL 36078

Telephone: (334) 283-5886 • Email: patreed1987@gmail.com

Please make checks payable to AOS. Checks must be received by October 5, 2023

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 @ \$25 per person	\$
Friday Night Hors d'oeuvre Buffet (no. of people)	
Banquet Buffet @ \$30 per person	\$
2024 DUES	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
88838 TALLASSEE HIGHWAY
TALLASSEE, ALABAMA 36078

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Email: patreed1987@gmail.com

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Life (family): \$550



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<http://www.alaudubon.org>

DAUPHIN ISLAND BIRD SANCTUARIES
<http://www.coastalbirding.org>

FRANCIS M. WESTON AUDUBON SOCIETY (PENSACOLA)
<http://www.fmwaudubon.org>

MOBILE BAY AUDUBON SOCIETY
<http://www.mobilebayaudubon.org>

ALABAMA WILDBIRD CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION
<http://www.bamabirds.com>

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