

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 43, NO. 1 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPRING 2023

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

FOUNDED 1952



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AOS 2023 SPRING MEETING
MEET THE SPEAKER:
DWIGHT COOLEY

*Cover: Male Shiny Cowbird photographed
in Gulf Shores by Tina Snisky-Hughes.*

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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 THE YELLOWHAMMER.....Robert Reed
 ALABAMA BIRD RECORDS.....Greg Jackson
 NORTHWEST FLORIDA BIRD RECORDS....Bob Duncan
 AOS ARCHIVES CURATOR.....Scot Duncan

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 Scot Duncan, Damien Simbeck

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Tom Haggerty

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 Collin Stempien, Bill Summerour

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Molly Folkerts Caldwell, Curt Burney
 Ken Hare, Annabel Markle

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

Eric Soehren

THE YELLOWHAMMER

Robert Reed
 Robin McDonald

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 Bob Duncan, Geoff Hill,
 Steve McConnell, Eric Soehren,
 Bill Summerour

EDUCATION

Shirley Farrell
 Carol Alford,
 Stan and Dana Hamilton,
 Don Self

FIELD TRIPS

Drew Haffenden

DAN C. HOLLIMAN RESEARCH FUND

Greg Harber
 Scot Duncan, Eric Soehren

MEETINGS

Patsy Russo
 Kathryn Palmore, Grace Sims



WELCOME TO THE ALABAMA Year of Birding! And there is even better news—there now will be two years of the Alabama Year of Birding.

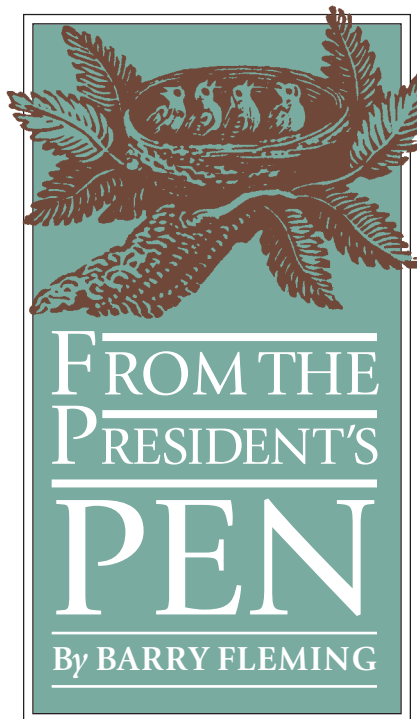
The Department of Tourism created this designation and is now launching a massive advertising campaign to inform those out-of-state of our Alabama's bountiful birding. Several of our members helped film the TV commercials being used. Tourism also put \$325,000 into upgrading and enhancing Alabama Birding Trails to add to the network of welcoming birding locations in the state. A state birding magazine is coming out soon, and this is only the beginning. AOS will continue to support and offer our assistance. Thank you, Alabama Tourism.

In keeping with the Alabama Year of Birding theme, who knows more about Alabama birds than Alabama birders, so both spring and fall meetings will feature our own. This spring's keynote speaker will be Dwight Cooley. Dwight worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 36 years at various wildlife refuges across the southeast and for the last twenty years he led the Wheeler NWR Complex as it has become one of the premiere wildlife refuges in our nation.

Now with three successful meetings since the pandemic and with meeting numbers at previous levels, I have noticed that there are many new members. Tiffany Kersten noted in her talk that there was a surge of people that began serious birding during the pandemic. Jon Dunn once called us the "friendliest birding group." So let us continue to welcome and offer guidance to new members and to those that dipped their toes into birding during the pandemic; encourage them to join AOS.

Following is an overview of several items that may be useful for new members:

There are two main ways members share the latest bird sightings, ALBirds and eBird. We urge all members to join both. ALBirds is a Yahoo discussion group that has the advantage of being timely and allowing for in-depth discussion. A recent conversation concerning underwing primary patterns



in the Kumlien's/Thayers complex of the Iceland Gull is an example. This is not possible on eBird.

On the other hand, if you have set your eBird preferences to programmed "alerts," it would be hard to imagine a faster way to be notified of a rare bird. Someone observes the bird in the field, presses a few buttons on a phone and you feel a buzz in your pocket. Recently with the first state record of White-tailed Hawk, observers immediately put the sighting on both ALBirds and eBird, and many people were able to quickly get down to see the bird.

Although AOS received national eBird recognition for our blitz to step-up coverage in under-birded counties a few years ago, there is still work to do in birding the four corners of the state and all points in between. eBird is also a great place to learn

about the status and distribution of species, and a place to store all of your bird records while at the same time sharing them with science and thus contributing through citizen science to greater bird knowledge.

Publications that members receive are *Alabama Birdlife* and *The Yellowhammer*. Eric Soehren compiles and edits the scientific journal, *Alabama Birdlife*, Bob Reed is the editor of the quarterly newsletter, *The Yellowhammer*, and both are designed by Robin McDonald. Both publications are state-of-the-art and have never looked better. The Bird Records Committee is also continually working to evaluate and validate sightings and routinely publish the latest Bird List of Alabama. The new checklist is on the website and available for use.

Two special events happen only at the spring meeting. Jenny Stowers hosts a lunch Saturday at 11:30 at her home on the bay for all AOS birders on the island. Since Covid, Jenny prefers to supply all food. There is always a big crowd, and the fellowship is warm. As folks slurp gumbo, occasionally from the crowd on her balcony you hear shouts like "Swallowtail Kite" and "Frigatebird." Secondly, Shirley Farrell, Education Committee chair, puts together the Spring Silent Auction, which happens in Shelby Center alongside the meeting. Last year more than \$1,300 was raised with all monies going to support the education committee's work throughout the

state. So, bring some extra folding money. You will be glad you did. If you feel so led, you may contact Shirley and offer your assistance. She is always in need of donated items to auction. Our society is very fortunate to have the labor and diverse skill sets of all those listed above.

Speaking of which, there are two skill sets you may be able to help us with. First, the board needs a treasurer. Pat Reed is doing great work stepping in on a temporary basis, but if you are good at organizing, adding, subtracting, and keeping record books and are willing to help, please contact me. Likewise, we need a Field Trip Committee chair. Drew Haffenden for years has done a wonderful job organizing—and often

leading—field trips, but he will become president in the fall and will not have time for these duties. You don't even need to be a field trip leader to do this job, you just have to know people who are. These are both board positions.

If you are reading this newsletter and haven't paid your yearly dues, relax; it's early in the year. But please pay now. Dues can be paid online at the website anytime or mailed with the form from this newsletter. Remember our partner, Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, in your giving. Every dollar to DIBS goes to preserve habitat for the birds in perpetuity.

I hope to see you, and the birds, at our spring meeting on beautiful Dauphin Island.

Shiny Cowbirds in Gulf Shores May Be the Start of Something Big

By LARRY GARDELLA

SHINY COWBIRDS ARE TROPICAL birds that usually live in fields, tree groves near farms, gardens, and plantations but also occur in undisturbed habitats such as riparian thickets, savanna, scrub in semiarid areas, and mangroves. In the United States they are usually found at bird feeders or in suburban areas on lawns or roadsides. When they show up somewhere in this county north of the bottom of Florida, it is usually only one or a few birds, and they are around for only a few days.

Over the last forty years or so, Shiny Cowbirds have been slowly advancing northward. They have become common on many Caribbean islands. There appears to be a permanent population in southern Florida.

More than 30 years ago, people speculated that Shiny Cowbirds would expand their range into much of the continental United States, just as other species such as Cattle Egret and Eurasian Collared-Dove have done. Cattle Egrets flew across from Africa on their own, while the Eurasian Collared-

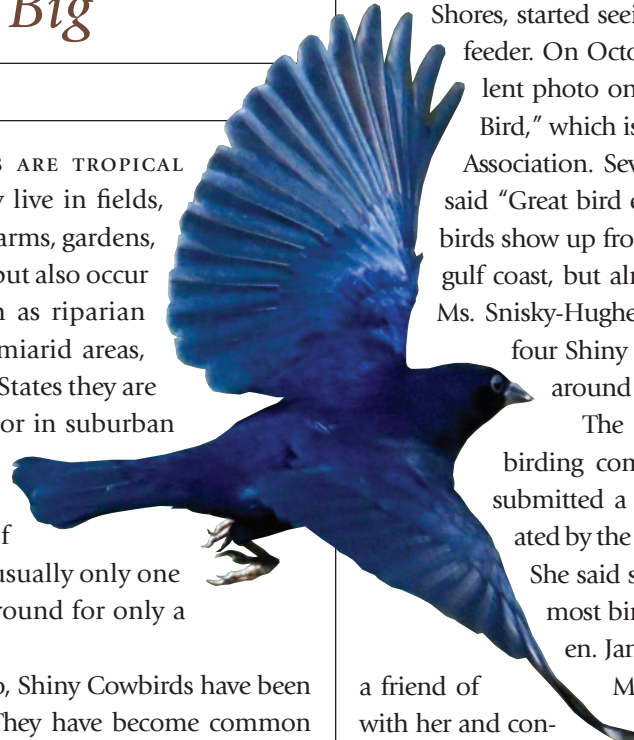
Doves were brought to the Caribbean. It is far too early to say for sure, but it appears that the long-awaited expansion of Shiny Cowbirds may have begun.

In early October, Tina Snisky-Hughes, a resident of Gulf Shores, started seeing Shiny Cowbirds coming to her feeder. On October 11, 2022, she posted an excellent photo on the Facebook group "What's This Bird," which is operated by the American Birding Association. Several people identified it, and one said "Great bird especially for the date. Shiny Cowbirds show up from time to time along the northern gulf coast, but almost always during April or May." Ms. Snisky-Hughes explained that she had three or four Shiny Cowbirds, and that they had been around for a week.

The news did not spread through the birding community until Ms. Snisky-Hughes submitted a post on eBird, the database operated by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. She said she had eight Shiny Cowbirds, and most birders assumed that she was mistaken. Janice Neitzel, a member of AOS and

a friend of Ms. Snisky-Hughes, got in touch with her and confirmed the identification. At that point, members of AOS began an investigation that we hope will eventually allow us to determine whether Gulf Shores has a new resident population of Shiny Cowbirds.

Brown-headed Cowbirds are common in Alabama, particularly in farm fields. Without a good view of the head, it is easy to mistake a Brown-headed Cowbird for the much rarer Shiny.



AOS WINTER MEETING, LAKE GUNTERSVILLE STATE PARK, JANUARY 27–29, 2023

Minutes of the AOS Board Meeting

By DORIS GERTLER, *Secretary*

RESIDENT BARRY FLEMING CALLED THE AOS Board of Directors meeting to order on January 20 at 6:00 pm, and the minutes from the October 7, 2022 meeting were approved.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

There are 45 registered for the winter meeting. Last year's deposit at Gunterville was transferred for this year's meeting. Dauphin Island meetings for spring 2023 and fall 2023 are set.

President Barry Fleming noted that Pat Reed has assumed the duties of interim Treasurer but that we need someone to fill that role. We also need a Field Outings Chairman as outgoing chairman Drew Haffenden will assume the President's duties in October 2023. All board members were asked to help in the search.

The question of where we should direct unspecified contributions in the future was raised. We have previously split the contribution between AOS and DIBS. A motion to split any contribution between DIBS and AOS was made by Larry Gardella and seconded by Stan Hamilton. The motion passed unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Pat Reed and Barry have been approved to handle accounts. The checking balance is \$24,816.53 with \$351 donated to DIBS. Dauphin Island has yet to bill AOS for the last meeting.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT—Larry Gardella and Pat Reed will work together to ensure we have an accurate list of membership with current emails.

THE YELLOWHAMMER—Bob Reed stated *The Yellowhammer* deadline is 2/10/23.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE—Shirley Farrell will be partnering with Legacy to hold a workshop for teachers at Wehle on

May 6, 2023. Legacy has a program called "Nuggets for Knowledge" and Shirley asked us to provide facts on ten birds. Our logo will be used and credit given. She would like conservation status to be included.

PUBLIC RELATIONS—The new members met via Zoom. Curt Burney has worked on the website and added a new Meeting tab. Molly Caldwell is working to increase social postings. She asked that we 'like' and share AOS postings to increase circulation. We are asked to send any photos to Molly.

MEETINGS—Eric Soehren suggested we consider a joint meeting with another ornithological society. They have been well attended in the past.

Per President Fleming, Cortney Weatherby, who coordinates Coastal Research Outreach, requested an opportunity to have a table at our meetings to talk about their work at Dauphin Island. It was agreed to extend the invitation.

WRITING INITIATIVE—Ken Hare and Larry Gardella are brainstorming to develop ideas for articles and also how to recruit people to write and where to submit/publish articles. (*AL Living*, SALT)

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE—Eric Soehren stated *Alabama Birdlife* continues to be updated.

AOS ARCHIVES CURATOR/SLIDES—President Fleming asked if we need a new curator (Scot Duncan is now the executive director at Alabama Audubon so cannot continue in this role). Additionally, is Tom Haggarty still in charge of the slides or perhaps Paul Kittle? Ken Hare stated the slides are on the website. Drew Haffenden and Ken Hare both discussed the possibility of digitizing the slides (roughly 2500) and perhaps the old records as they are necessary for tax reasons. Item was tabled.

ALABAMA YEAR OF THE BIRD—Note from Rick Harmon attached to the agenda. After much discussion, it was decided Ken Hare, who has worked with Rick Harmon, will reach out and see how we can help and if we are eligible for grant money.

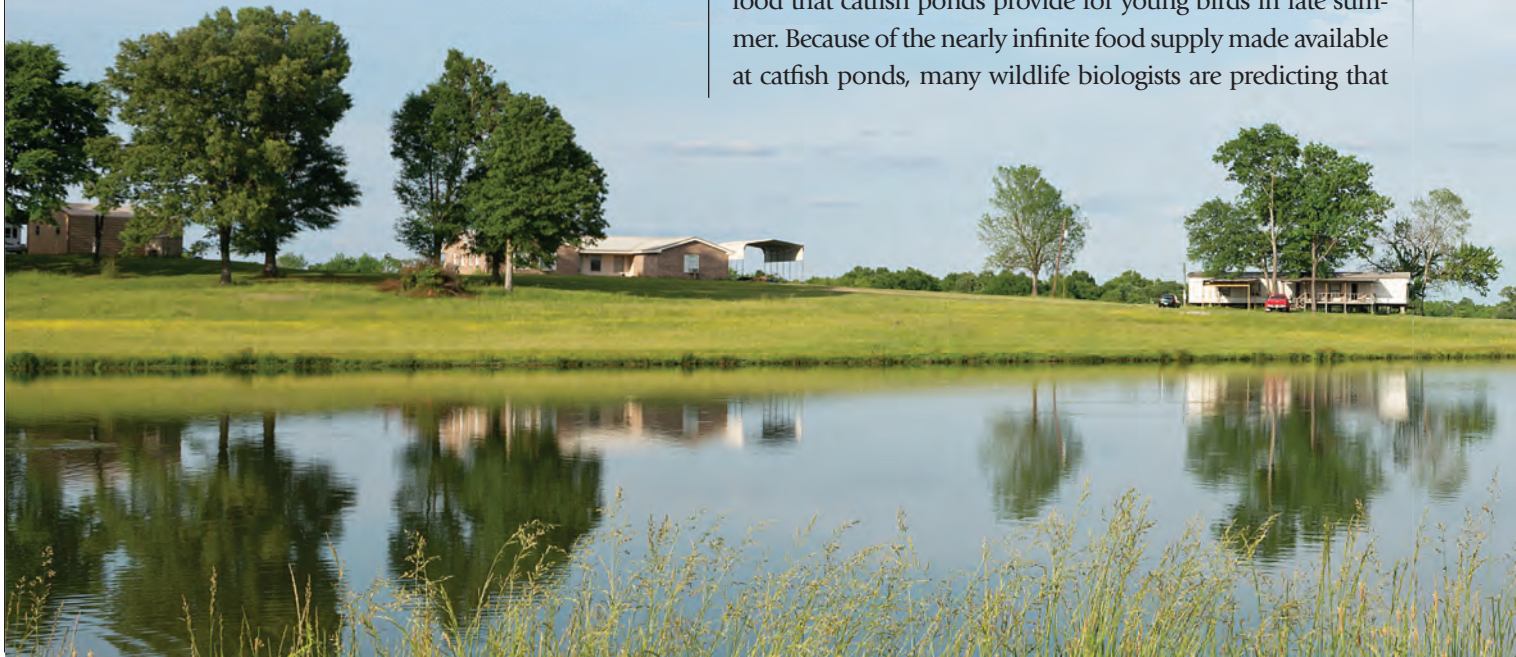
Catfish Ponds as Important Bird Habitat

By GEOFF HILL

AQUACULTURE HAS TRANSFORMED THE AVIFAUNA of an entire region of Alabama. The former prairie regions of Hale, Dallas, Perry, Marengo, and Greene Counties, which were converted primarily to cotton plantations in the 19th century, are now dominated by networks of large ponds built to raise catfish (or sometimes other aquatic animals such as shrimp). It is a highly artificial landscape—large rectangular ponds with sharply defined banks supporting little emergent aquatic vegetation and with short grass on the berms between ponds. Nevertheless, this open, artificial landscape in some ways reconstitutes prairie habitat and is now used by numerous open-country and water birds. Significant portions of some bird populations now depend on the catfish farm agro-ecosystem, and more birds seem to be adapting to this novel environment.

Perhaps no bird species as been more affected by—and seems to have benefited more from—the construction of vast pond networks in West Alabama than the Wood Stork. In the mid-twentieth century, Wood Stork populations were small and declining, and it appeared to be a bird species that might

soon disappear from the United States (populations in South America were doing better). Two decades into the twenty-first century, the story of Wood Storks has been completely re-written. Wood Stork populations have rebounded and continue to increase. In 2022, there were twice as many Wood Stork nests in South Carolina than a decade before, and that benchmark from the prior decade was far above the low point in the late twentieth century. The numbers of Wood Storks breeding in Florida have also increased substantially. Many of these South Carolina and Florida breeders are now spending the summer in West Alabama. For a (yet unpublished) dissertation project, Dr. Simona Picardi put radio transmitters on Wood Storks at breeding colonies in South Carolina and Florida. Each summer, she tracked a high proportion of her tagged storks to catfish farms in West Alabama and primarily to Hale County. This is not a surprising result for anyone who has visited pond complexes in West Alabama from July to September. It is now common to stand in one spot in Hale County and count 100 Wood Storks at a single pond, and there are hundreds of ponds. I think there is a direct link between increasing stork populations in the southeastern U.S. and a huge supply of food that catfish ponds provide for young birds in late summer. Because of the nearly infinite food supply made available at catfish ponds, many wildlife biologists are predicting that



Wood Storks may begin nesting in West Alabama. Along with Wood Storks, huge congregations of Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Turkey Vultures, and Black Vultures are now found year-round at the catfish ponds. I have seen no estimates of the impact of catfish ponds on the populations of these four species, but it seems obvious that the ponds are boosting the numbers of fish-eating birds. Bald Eagles now breed in the area and their populations also seem high.

The effects of the pond complexes are not limited to Wood Storks. Hale and surrounding counties are not known historically as places that hold many ducks in the winter. However, the habitat provided by catfish ponds appears to be attracting increasing numbers of waterfowl. During a visit to Hale County in December 2022, I recorded 19 species of ducks and geese including 500 Lesser Scaup and nearly 100 Canvasbacks, and this was far from a complete census of the area because most ponds are out of sight of public roads. In previous winter visits I haven't seen nearly this many waterfowl, and it does not seem surprising that a vast network of shallow ponds would attract increasing numbers of waterfowl. At present only a few migratory geese or Sandhill Cranes use the area, but I predict that will change as birds discover the area as a wintering location and a tradition of wintering in West Alabama spreads among waterfowl.

Nesting prairie birds also find the catfish pond agro-ecosystem attractive (or at least bearable). The pond networks in Hale County are the most reliable place in Alabama to find nesting Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. One is almost guaranteed to find at least a pair during a summer visit to the ponds.

Loggerhead Shrikes and Eastern Meadowlarks, two species declining in most areas of Alabama, also appear to be particularly abundant as nesting birds in the pond complexes. Areas in the vicinity of the catfish ponds are also the best places in the state to find breeding Painted Buntings. This species is not tied specifically to the ponds per se, but the agricultural landscape that accompanies catfish ponds produces a combination of open field, fallow fields, and windbreaks that buntings find suitable as habitat. Finally, both Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites nest in the vicinity of the pond complexes and seem to commonly forage over the ponds.

The agro-environment created by commercial rearing of channel catfish is far from ideal wildlife habitat. No doubt, birds and other native wildlife would be better served if tens of thousands of acres of native prairie and marshland were restored and maintained with light grazing and fire. Realistically, however, such a conservation effort is not likely. With the collapse of cotton farming, much of the region now devoted to catfish ponds would likely be short-rotation loblolly pine plantation if catfish farming had not developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Catfish farming is a major feature of the West Alabama landscape for the foreseeable future, and it will be interesting to see how populations of birds continue to adapt to this new environment.

Editor's Note: I assume these birds affect the farmers' bottom line. Does anyone know about farmer efforts to dissuade such avian attention around these ponds?



PHOTO OF MARENGO COUNTY CATFISH POND BY ROBIN McDONALD

AOS WINTER MEETING, LAKE GUNTERSVILLE STATE PARK, JANUARY 27-29, 2023

AOS Winter 2023 Meeting Report

By BARRY FLEMING

THE WINTER MEETING AT LAKE GUNTERSVILLE State Park started off with a "Peent." President Fleming heard word that American Woodcocks were displaying along the road leading to the Lodge. The word spread and members on the way to the social hour began stopping by the location. By 5:30 "peent" vocalizations were being heard and were reported back to the members at the social hour via text. Those interested in going scurried the half mile to the scene. Those remaining seemed comfortable socializing, perhaps with a drink from the lounge, waiting for the unveiling of the buffet. Not wishing for anyone to miss out, President Fleming treated the group to a re-enactment of the courtship display ritual, including walking, calling, the spiral upward flight style, and the free-falling flight with warbling vocalization. The next evening before the banquet all others who wished were able to see or hear the woodcocks.

At the social, members' photography presentations begin with beautiful photos of birds of Alabama, with related behavior studies, first by Bob Reed, who shared birds from the Montgomery CBC and his backyard. Jared Sapp showed images from Alaska and provided surprising and humorous stories of the bird life there. Geoff Hill presented a step-by-step guide through his recent trip to Uganda, urging travelers to consider this location which boasts exceptional guides, inexpensive and easy travel, and where super rare birds are seen up close and personal.

Linda Reynolds, long-time AOS member and past-president, was the first naturalist at Lake Guntersville State Park beginning in the 1980s. A wonderful, chronological, retrospective video and slide show of her work for the park followed, usually showing her holding an animal such as a possum, rabbit or snake and surrounded by people enthralled in learning about nature and the environment. In all photographs and videos her warm, giving spirit was evident. Thank you, Linda, for many years of service to the park and to AOS.

Saturday morning field trips began with great conditions of cool, grey skies, no rain and little wind, perfect for viewing waterfowl in open water. Linda Reynolds, with daughter Michele riding shotgun, led the trip around the lakefront. The group stopped every half mile or so and scanned the water. After a few stops it was evident that this body of water held massive amounts of birds. A group of 75 Common Loons was counted in a protected cove, but when scanning further down the lake you could see there were hundreds more.

At one stop a pair of Bald Eagles flew by, both carrying material to refurbish a nest. Members were able to get good photographs of both eagles on the nest. All expected ducks were seen as the group eased down the shoreline including Common Goldeneyes, Canvasbacks, Redheads, a few sporty, Red-breasted Mergansers and at least one each Common Merganser and Greater Scaup. Ducks, coots, gulls, and cormorants were in the thousands. More than a hundred White Pelicans seen far away seemed to sparkle as the sun began to break through the clouds.

Dee Scott led a field trip to the J. D. and Annie S. Hayes Nature Preserve, while Ken Ward led one to the Goldsmith-Schiffman Wildlife Sanctuary and then to the Hays Preserve. Both areas contain a rich variety of wooded habitat with plenty of water, as evidenced by both a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks and vocal Barred Owls. The woods were filled with woodpeckers, especially Red-headed Woodpeckers, sparrows, kinglets, and nuthatches. Up to 50 Rusty Blackbirds was a good number for a species in decline. Like the lakeshore trip, there were lots of birds to look at and conditions for viewing them were favorable.

Situated high on a bluff with rooms overlooking the mountainous lake, Guntersville State Park Lodge provided a beautiful setting for the Saturday night gathering. The buffet-style meal was very good, with several compliments on the German chocolate cake. Around 60 people were in attendance.

The keynote speaker, Tiffany Kersten, is bird guide and owner of Nature Ninja Birding tours in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. She broke the lower 48 Big Year record in 2021 with 726 species, and her speaking schedule this year is full. AOS was fortunate to host her on her first speaking engagement of the year.

Tiffany's talk was illustrated with pictures of special birds experienced during her Big Year, with a number in bold type, like 338, 462, or 699, superimposed. She sometimes had these "new bird" experiences alone, like California Condor, but sometimes was with friends or strangers where photos of "lifer celebration shots" were appropriate. Her Big Year attempt was unconventional in that she started late and didn't even declare she was going for it until long into the year. She didn't have a grand scheme and much money, but her birding buddies started pulling for her and alerting her to birds across the country as she got closer. She spent more than one hundred nights in a tent. That is dedication. She kept track of how much a bird cost. One required two expensive plane flights for an over one-thousand dollar total. Another super rarity landed not far from her home and cost less than fifteen dollars.

During the lengthy question and answer period, in which Tiffany gave out a safety alarm to each questioner, one question stood out: "Did the rigorous Big Year make you tougher?" Tiffany answered, "Well, I think I am stronger and have a softer heart." What a fine outcome of a Big Year quest, which would also be a noble goal for us all.

The Sunday morning field trip ventured where no AOS field trip has gone before. Linda Reynolds led the way to what she considers a must-see area, Morgan Cove, and High Falls. In Morgan Cove, among a few loafing gulls, were exactly one-hundred Wilson's Snipe—the largest group anyone had remembered seeing. Then someone spotted a Great-Blue Heron in a tree, then another, then another. It turned out to be a heron rookery. Near Buck's Pocket State Park, the group took the short hike to picturesque High Falls which was uniformly agreed to be a spectacular place.

Compilation was held in the central area of the lodge and when all bird species were recorded, the collective total seen by members during the conference was 108. Afterwards, small groups of members kept telling stories and laughing for a while in the inviting lodge. We will return to Lake Guntersville State Park sometime in the future.

New Members

Tatiana Bidikov • Erin Consuegra
 Erin Curry • Ashley Goode
 Douglas Horacek • Zach Low
 Leslie Miller • Sarah Odom
 Anita Overton • Debbie Patton
 Susan Patton • Rebecca Poore
 Kevin Shaw • Lindsay Smith
 Tina Snisky-Hughes
 Mary Stockard • Mark Stockfish

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

Herb and Terry Lewis

Honoraria and Acknowledgments

AOS DONATIONS

Herb and Terry Lewis

Special thanks to Hal Smith of Wild Birds Unlimited for his generous donation to attract future speakers.

DIBS DONATIONS

Richard Biel • Joan Dixon
 Barry Fleming • Jean Folsom
 Ken and Julie Hare • Herb and Terry Lewis
 Park and Catherine McGehee
 Anne G. Miller • Leslie Miller
 Sarah Odom • Anita Overton
 Rebecca Poore • Thomas and Lani Powell
 Bob and Pat Reed • Michelle Reynolds
 Tina Snisky-Hughes • Marilyn Steelman
 Mary Stockard • Mark Stockfish

Membership Dues

DUES FOR 2023 WERE DUE JANUARY 1, 2023. PLEASE RENEW as soon as possible with Pat Reed, 88838 Tallassee Highway, Tallassee, AL 36078 or through PayPal.

—Larry Gardella, Membership Chair

*2023 AOS Winter Meeting Compilation List
Lake Guntersville State Park, Guntersville,
Alabama, January 27–29*

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE WEEKEND WERE ROSS'S Goose, Whooping Crane, and Lapland Longspur. Count total was 109 species.

Snow Goose
Ross's Goose
Greater White-fronted Goose
Canada Goose
Wood Duck
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
American Black Duck
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Greater Scaup
Lesser Scaup
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Mourning Dove
American Coot
Sandhill Crane
Whooping Crane
Killdeer
Wilson's Snipe
American Woodcock
Bonaparte's Gull

Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Foster's Tern
Common Loon
Double-crested Cormorant
American White Pelican
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Bald Eagle
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Eastern Screech Owl
Great Horned Owl
Barred Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Pileated Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
American Kestrel
Eastern Phoebe
Loggerhead Shrike
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Tree Swallow

Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown-headed Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Winter Wren
Carolina Wren
European Starling
Brown Thrasher
Northern Mockingbird
Eastern Bluebird
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Cedar Waxwing
House Sparrow
American Pipit
House Finch
Purple Finch
American Goldfinch
Lapland Longspur
Chipping Sparrow
Fox Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
White-throated Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
Eastern Towhee
Eastern Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird

Rusty Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Common Grackle
Common Yellowthroat
Pine Warbler
Palm Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Northern Cardinal

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

Thanks for the Stories

THE 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 carrier pigeon if you need to. The addresses are on the back cover.

AOS SPRING MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, APRIL 21–23, 2023

AOS Spring 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, APRIL 14

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

FRIDAY, APRIL 21

6:15 a.m. Field Trip

Baldwin County Birds and Blooms with Drew Haffenden

Where: Shelby Center

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

SATURDAY, APRIL 22

6:30 a.m. Field Trip 1

Exploring Dauphin Island with Dwight Cooley and Barry Fleming

Where: Shelby Center

6:30 a.m. Field Trip 2

Birds of Pelican Bay Peninsula with Drew Haffenden

Where: Public Beach and Pier parking lot.

11:30 a.m. Potluck—Lunch at the home of Jennie Stowers. Jennie will provide *all* food.

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. Announcements and Discussion of Field Trips

7:30 p.m. Keynote Speaker: Dwight Cooley

SUNDAY, APRIL 23

6:30 a.m. Field Trip: Blakely Island Ponds

Field trip will go forward if scouting indicates good birding there. See page 13 for details.

Noon Compilation (Includes all bird sightings in Mobile and Baldwin Counties from Friday, April 21 to noon, April 23, 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)

A O S SPRING MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, APRIL 21–23, 2023

Spring Meeting Field Trips



ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST EMAIL DREW HAFFENDEN at andrew@natasp.com 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.

Friday, April 21, 2023

BALDWIN COUNTY BIRDS AND BLOOMS

Trip Leader: Drew Haffenden

Meeting Time: 6:15 a.m. for a departure at 6:30 a.m. sharp.

Meeting Place: Shelby Center

We'll start by heading north to Splinter Hill Bog, about 1 1/4 hours from DI up I-65. This bog is one of the largest White-topped Pitcher Plant bogs in America, with four other pitcher plant species also present as well as species of sundews and bladderworts. Our main birding goal, Bachman's Sparrow, should be singing from exposed perches. Other birds include woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatch, possibly Grasshopper Sparrow, and other species typical of Longleaf Pine habitat. If there has been recent rain parts of the track may be muddy. We return to the coast and Meaher State Park to observe birds from the boardwalk in the shallows of Mobile Bay. The park can hold a variety of birds including shorebirds, herons and egrets, gallinules, Boat-tailed Grackle, Gull-billed Terns and occasionally Anhinga and Roseate Spoonbill. Alligators are also regular here. Continuing along the Mobile Causeway, our next stop, around 11:45–noon, is a seafood restaurant on the Causeway, where we have views overlooking the Mobile-Tensaw Delta while eating some of the best seafood in Alabama.

After lunch we return to Dauphin Island, arriving by 3 p.m. in time for the incoming migrants.

Saturday, April 22, 2023

EXPLORING DAUPHIN ISLAND

Trip Leaders: Dwight Cooley and Barry Fleming

Meeting Time: 6:30 a.m.

Meeting Place: Shelby Center

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. In addition to the Shell Mounds 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 circuit of one mile, there is not a lot of distance walked on this outing, though almost all of our time is spent on foot.

NOTE: It is important for all participants to meet at the Shelby Center, 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: Drew Haffenden

Meeting Time: 6:30 a.m.

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

Join DI resident Drew Haffenden to get to know the birds of Alabama's richest beach habitat, Pelican Island, formerly an island, but 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. We'll take the opportunity to turn the walk into an easy mini-workshop, quickly learning to separate the small plovers from the small sandpipers and from each other, separating often confusing species such as Caspian and Royal Tern, and learning many ID points rarely seen in the guide books. It's an easy walk on flat sand, and our distance traveled depends on how close the birds are to the pier. 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, April 23, 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: Shelby Center. 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 years 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, are often seen. 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 on 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.

Have You Read a Good Bird Book Lately?

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

Upcoming Meetings

SPRING MEETING—April 21–23, 2023

Dauphin Island, Alabama

FALL MEETING—October 13–15, 2023

Dauphin Island, Alabama

WINTER MEETING—January 26–28, 2024

Location TBA

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Summer 2023

May 10, 2023

Fall 2023

August 10, 2023

Winter 2023

November 10, 2023

AOS SPRING MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, APRIL 21-23, 2023

Meet the Speaker: Dwight Cooley

A Grand Experiment—Approaching a Century of Bird Conservation at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

FOLKS IN THE THEN SLEEPY CITIES OF DECATUR, Athens and Huntsville and all of north Alabama were going about their lives on July 7, 1938, confident that the Great Depression was winding down. Franklin D. Roosevelt had been elected President in 1933 and had almost immediately initiated his New Deal programs to bring the country out of the depression. The day was probably like most...hot and humid. Far away in our nation's capital, President Roosevelt was signing Executive Order 7926 establishing Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge on what would become 35,000 acres. The land had been acquired by the Tennessee Valley Authority, one of the President's New Deal programs, as part of an effort to tame the Tennessee River with a series of dams and bring hydroelectric power, navigation, and recreation to the area.

From the outset, Wheeler was to be a bold experiment. It was the first national wildlife refuge established on a multi-purpose reservoir in the United States, the first refuge to establish a farming program to provide food for wildlife and a joint venture with TVA, who owned the property and continues to own the majority of refuge lands. Many thought the experiment would be a failure...wildlife conservation could not possibly compete with navigation and operation of the dams. Management of the refuge would turn out to be a challenge. Funding for staff, facilities and equipment for management would be scarce initially and remains a challenge today.

Almost immediately after establishment, waterfowl started using wetlands on the new refuge. The burgeoning farming program was providing more and more food for waterbirds and other species and by the early 1960s upwards of 60,000 geese, 75,000 ducks and untold numbers of other migratory birds and wildlife were wintering on the refuge. Like most areas managed for wildlife, waterfowl numbers

tend to fluctuate due to a number of reasons. However, wintering Canada Goose numbers started a steady decline in 1963 and would fall to below 1,000 by the turn of the century. Fortunately, numbers of other wintering waterfowl remain at historical levels. Because of the variety and number of birds, today Wheeler NWR is one of the most visited refuges in the South.

We will take a look at the programs that have contributed to success of the refuge and explore some of the personalities that have been a part of that success.



DWIGHT COOLEY grew up in rural Limestone County and developed an early interest in birds when he received a pair of binoculars for Christmas when he was eleven. His first sighting through those binoculars was of 20 Cedar Waxwings on Christmas morning. Of course, at the time, he had no idea what species those 20 birds were...but he was hooked. He worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 36 years at locations throughout the southeast including Merritt Island NWR in Florida, Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR in Mississippi, and Alligator River and Pea Island NWR's on the North Carolina Outer Banks. From 1997 until his retirement in 2016, he served first as Deputy Project Leader and then Project Leader at Wheeler NWR Complex, a group of seven national wildlife refuges spread over 12,500 square miles of northern Alabama. His professional interests revolve around migratory bird management, habitat management and restoration, endangered species management, and connecting people with nature. He holds a BS in biology from Athens State University and an MS in zoology and wildlife from Mississippi State University. He and his wife Deb are both native Alabamians.

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

Pat Reed, 88838 Tallassee Highway, Tallassee, AL 36078

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Email address _____ Phone _____

**YOU CAN ALSO JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP ONLINE AT WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG
PLEASE ADD 3% TO PAYPAL TRANSACTIONS**

AOS SPRING MEETING 2023 REGISTRATION FORM

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 April 11, 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	\$
2023 DUES	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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