

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 44, NO. 1 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPRING 2024

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

FOUNDED 1952



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**AOS 2024 WINTER MEETING
MEET THE SPEAKER:
NATHAN PIEPLOW ON BIRD SONG**

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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FIELD TRIPS

VACANT

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MEETINGS

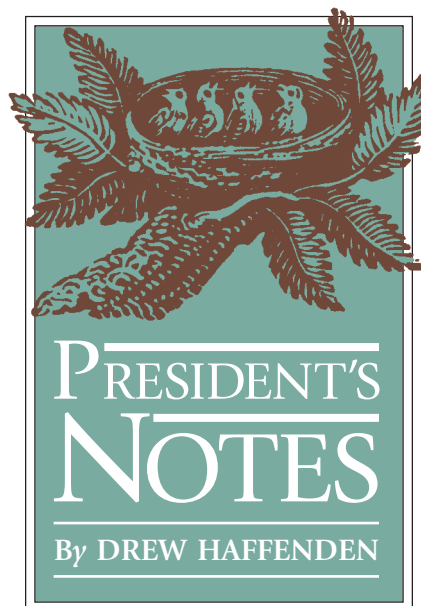
VACANT



AFTER JUST A FEW MONTHS AS President I quickly have come to appreciate how much past presidents have done for our Society. I hope I can at least live up to the high standard they have set. Our winter guest speaker, Amar Ayyash, is on the board of the Illinois Ornithological Society and he commented what a dynamic group we have. He was very surprised to learn we typically had over a hundred for our spring meeting; thirty-five is a good number for them, and they have given up on fall and winter meetings. He offered that most other state societies are in the same situation as AOS, with falling numbers and an aging membership. So, thank you all for supporting AOS, and I am hoping to reward that by creating interesting and useful meetings for our members. In this vein our Spring meeting will feature Nathan Pieplow, known as one of the country's leading ear birders, and author of the two *Peterson Guides on Birding by Ear*. As with the winter meeting, the format will be a 45-minute workshop Friday evening then the keynote talk Saturday, with the speaker accompanying the Saturday morning outing.

For fall we have Cin-ty Lee, who has for some years been publishing articles and papers on new approaches to identifying flycatchers. Princeton published his book last year covering Empidonax and Pewees, and his Kingbirds and *Myiarchus* volume is coming out mid-year. I have the E&P volume, and it is excellent

And speaking of the winter meeting, I was told numerous times what a good meeting it was. This despite rain, drizzle and fog! I think the success was due to the format, and especially an excellent speaker in Amar Ayyash. Not only was the workshop great, interactive and even had a quiz thrown in, in which the right answer came from the audience most of the time! AOS members are quick learners. Amar was also an excellent guide in the field, pointing out relevant ID features of the various gulls we saw, and how they differed from similar species. It seemed that everyone took home a new interest in gulls, learning that they may not be so difficult after all, at least most of the time. I think this is what in person meetings



are about, learning from and often catching the enthusiasm from other birders, both experts for ID tips and those who are simply excited when they are in the field and there are birds to be seen. (Quite often this is the same person, as we saw in Amar!) Other aspects of the meetings are often being able to do what you couldn't by yourself or just with a couple of friends. I think sitting in a boat on the Tennessee River surrounded by four to five thousand Bonaparte's Gulls resting in all directions on the water and flying around us as the sun's light deepened into evening will not be forgotten by any of us.

More good news is that Records Committee Secretary Steve McConnell has for the last couple of years been working on the backlog of rare bird sightings requiring confirmation. Twenty-five records from as far back as 2021 and as recent as late 2023 have been reviewed; all that remains is two that require an in-person meeting to discuss and one that is moving to a second round of voting. A couple of new ones have come in that will be voted on in the next round. This is a vast difference from previously, and I want to thank Steve and the Records Committee for this. Exciting among these records was a first state record, White-tailed Hawk, and a second state record, LaSagra's Flycatcher.

In my first address I asked for suggestions of what you as a member would like to see AOS doing to be more relevant and useful to your own birding, and might also encourage other birders out there to join—or return. The response is so far less than over-whelming. There must be some ideas out there that would help both you as a birder and AOS as a membership organization! Please send thoughts either directly to me—andrew@natasp.com—or the AOS email aosbirdsinfo.org. See you on Dauphin Island in April. Good birding!

2024 Dues Were Due January 1, 2024

PLEASE RENEW YOUR AOS MEMBERSHIP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE with Hal Smith, AOS Treasurer, 3590 Eagle Nest, Opelika, AL 36801; aosbirdstreasurer@gmail.com; or through PayPal at aosbirds.org.

AOS WINTER MEETING, JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, JANUARY 26–28, 2024

AOS Winter Meeting Report

By LARRY GARDELLA, DREW HAFFENDEN, AND BOB REED

THE WEEKEND WAS A STUDY IN CONTRASTS. IT WAS warm Friday; it was wet—with flash flooding Saturday morning—cool with bands of rain interspersed with weak sunshine Saturday afternoon, and cold and windy Sunday morning.

At 1 pm, Friday, despite a forecast of a wet day, Captain Steve, renowned gull expert Amar Ayyash, and thirteen other birders left the docks at Joe Wheeler lodge marina in a pontoon boat. We went about six miles, a little way past Spring Creek. Gulls were our main focus, but we enjoyed about 725 American White Pelicans, dozens of Horned Grebes exploding from the water surface in their distinctive running flight, some groups of ducks, including Common Goldeneyes, and Bald Eagles flying over the nearby trees.

We found a large raft of loons in the area where four Red-throated Loons had recently been reported. We checked them out and paid particular attention to some small pale-backed loons, but it turned out all the day's loons were Common. As we turned around to start our way back toward the dock, we started finding numbers of gulls. Initially mostly Ring-billed Gulls with a sprinkling of Herrings and at least one Lesser Black-backed. As we would experience the next day as well, Amar was a very good expert to have along, explaining finer ID points including age of all the gull species seen; his enthusiasm, especially when surrounded by thousands of Bonaparte's Gulls, was infectious. Damien Simbeck spotted a Franklin's Gull among them, and almost everyone on the boat got to enjoy the rarity. In the four hours we were out we tallied 28 species and some 12,700 individuals! Included in this tally was an amazing 6,300 Bonaparte's Gulls, with about 6,000 of them combining into one roosting flock, many of which lit on the water not far from our boat. Quite a sight, and quite a lot of birds to work through for anything different, especially as hundreds of Ringbills and some Herrings were mixed in. We returned to the dock happy.

The forecast for Saturday morning was dire, heavy rain most of the day. But when we woke up to buckets of rain, we

saw that there would be a gap in the rain about 10 a.m., and that we would be able to make the planned trips, just starting a bit late. The Key Cave trip started off by stopping at the lower viewing area at Wheeler Dam, so that we could all look for the rare Neotropic Cormorant that was being occasionally seen there. Fortunately, we all got scope views of the Neotropic on the right upright of a tower, separate from all the Double-crested Cormorants. It was well worth the raindrops. Instead of following the original plan, we headed directly to Waterloo, reaching it just after breaking out of the band of rain. There were not too many ducks in the water, but we enjoyed a Brown Creeper, White-breasted Nuthatches, both kinglets, a Winter Wren, and other woodland birds.

We stopped in town for a rest stop and provisioning, Cedar Waxwings flying around and both species of vulture soaring above.

At Brush Creek Park, we saw four species of woodpecker, both Brown-headed and White-breasted Nuthatches, a Belted Kingfisher, and Fish Crows, which have only become common in the county in the last few years.

We made a quick stop on County Road 2 in Florence to check for Fox Sparrows. Although we did not see any, we did hear one singing and another calling. We drove by a field with 25 Wild Turkeys out in the open a bit after noon, then arrived at Church Pond. There, we found a Ross's Goose along with Canada Geese, Northern Shovelers, Gadwall, Mallards, Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaup, and Buffleheads. eBird list at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S159933599>.

Our last stop was at the Cypress Creek Water Treatment ponds. At least one Greater Scaup was present along with 50 Lesser Scaups, a Northern Shoveler, and Buffleheads. Most people got to see a Spotted Sandpiper. Two adult Bald Eagles joined two immatures in a tree not far from the southwest pond. eBird list with photos at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S159945562>.

We were all glad that we had braved the elements to take part in the trip.



An American White Pelicans (Pelecanus erythrorhynchos), one of a flock of about 725 seen at Joe Wheeler State Park during the AOS winter meeting. (Bob Reed).

Another group, led by Damien Simbeck and Drew, headed first to Wheeler and then Wilson Dams. After leaving the cormorants at Wheeler, they birded Town Creek Marsh, which provided 33 species, excellent for a rainy day and an area of only about 100 yards long. A solitary Long-billed Dowitcher was identified, three Bald Eagles flew over, and we had a chance to test ourselves on Scaup ID. We then did a loop through farmland including the Sinks and Marthaler Pond on the way to Wilson Dam, stopping when birds were seen. Gadwall, Buffleheads, Mallards and others were seen at various wet areas. A bunch of Horned Larks in a field, and a Lapland Longspur with them brought the caravan to a halt. We eventually made it to Wilson Dam as the weather seemed ready to move back into rain mode. We started sorting through the gulls, along with a thousand or so cormorants and 300 White Pelicans. While Amar was following a suspicious looking Herring Gull, Drew was following a first cycle

Lesser Black-backed Gull. Eventually others headed off for a warming lunch and to get out of the drizzle; Amar and Drew continued for a bit longer then decided that they too would head off. Although it was cool and with some rain, the birding was good, with some 2500 birds of 51 species, including two rarer species, Lapland Longspur and Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Friday evening, Amar Ayyash led us through a gull identification class chocked full of helpful pointers on gull anatomy and identification of gulls of all sizes and ages. He reminded us that there are really three rules for gull identification: allow for variation, allow for variation, and allow for variation, which is another way of saying that gulls most definitely do not play by the rules.

Saturday evening, he led us through gull behavior and observations from his two decades of being a "gull man."

Saturday afternoon, Jennings Earnest, the newly minted Park Naturalist for Joe Wheeler State Park, shared his passion for Common Loons, including migration, vocalizations, and breeding behavior.

The weekend proved to be a very enjoyable one, visiting friends, both human (36) and avian (109).

AOS WINTER MEETING, JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, JANUARY 26–28, 2024

Minutes of the Winter AOS Board Meeting

By DORIS GERTLER, *Secretary*



THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY BOARD of Directors met January 19, 2024, via TEAMS. Vice President Shirley Farrell opened the meeting at 6:00 PM. The abbreviated minutes from the October 6, 2023 meeting as published in *The Yellowhammer* were unanimously accepted.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Acting Treasurer Pat Reed submitted the following report:

Total Assets: \$60,157.45

CD: \$29,695.52

Checking Account: \$29,695.52

Total Expenses: \$7663.94.

Greg Jackson discussed the need to utilize money markets or high-yield savings accounts rather than low yield checking account and also to hold money in several higher yielding CDs. Annabel Markle asked if we should discuss returning to the Friday night potluck at the meetings to decrease financial outlay? The Treasurer's Report was accepted unanimously.

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

VP Farrell has agreed to handle annual meetings until President Haffenden appoints someone. She is awaiting word from Joe Wheeler Park to finalize the winter meeting.

There is an AOSbirdsinfo@gmail.com listed on the website so more research is needed to be able to use it. Google Drive would be useful to store documents.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Conservation and Dan C. Holliman Research Fund—Greg Harber reported that there are two applicants for the scholarships, and we will need to defer our discussion/approval until projects have been reviewed.

The City of Hoover is drafting a new use plan for city parks. Greg Jackson and Alabama Audubon have submitted

letters. Greg Harber sent a letter of support encouraging a more bird-friendly environment at the parks.

Recently Greg Harber was made aware that the funding for Forever Wild provided by outer continental shelf leasing program may not provide consistent amounts, and he will research the situation.

Membership—Larry Gardella stated that efforts to increase membership and for generating content for media have not gone well, and he looks forward to meeting with President Haffenden in the near future to discuss.

Social Media—Molly Caldwell has been posting regularly to the AOS Facebook page and has noticed slightly increased engagement. Content is an issue and perhaps highlighting/interviewing AOS members might be interesting. She also wondered if beginning birder workshops or online webinars might be worthwhile. Another poster contest (as we did in 2019) with invitations to college students may increase interest.

VP Farrell has some new graphics to send out. Molly Caldwell would like to start an Instagram page. Stan Hamilton stated it is important to get nationally recognized speakers for our meetings, promote them and spend money to engage them. Bob Reed stated that we need to announce these speakers much further in advance.

Greg Jackson wondered if we could use strategies similar to Birdfest. Eric Soehren stated that Birdfest advertises nationwide, runs concurrently with Conservation Expo, builds off its past success and adds new trips, workshops and speakers and is open to everyone. Larry Gardella added that merchants are recruited and their support defrays costs.

Alabama Bird Records Committee—Steve McConnell submitted a written report. Three of the seven members finished their terms in November 2023. An election will be held at the next ABRC meeting.

Alabama Birdlife—Volume 68, Number 2, December 2022 issue has been sent out. As submissions are received, newer reports will be completed. Designer Robin McDonald has been doing a tremendous job.

The Yellowhammer—The final print copy of the publication has been sent out. Bob Reed stated that we lack the emails of about 35 members. Postcards will be mailed to those members, requesting an update.

Censusing—Greg Jackson hopes to have a DeKalb County summer bird count.

Education—VP Farrell reports Legacy is working with AOS to develop a birding curriculum specific to Alabama. The curriculum will be on both Legacy and AOS websites and

will be free to teachers. Training will be available. We need to publicize this curriculum. VP Farrell asked for input concerning content for K-12 students.

NEW BUSINESS

A State Park naturalist will conduct a walk/talk at each AOS meeting held at state facilities. The speaker for the Winter meeting is Jennings Ernest on the topic of loons

Hal Smith, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited of Auburn and an AOS member, has agreed to serve as Treasurer as of 2/1/24. His appointment was approved unanimously.

A motion to allow the Board to change the percentage charged members to cover PayPal fees from 3% to 4% passed unanimously. VP Farrell asked that we consider a Zoom account for AOS. A PRO Account is \$160 annually and could host 100 attendees.

Our Thanks To These AOS Donors

Gulf Breeze Motel

On Beautiful Dauphin Island, Alabama!

FOR MANY YEARS, MIKE TAFRA, OWNER OF THE GULF BREEZE Motel on Dauphin Island, has provided a room for the AOS speaker, spring and fall, free of charge. Thank you, Mr. Tafra and Gulf Breeze, for your continued support of AOS.



IT HAS BECOME THE HABIT OF HAL SMITH, OWNER OF WILD Birds Unlimited in Auburn, Alabama, to provide, at each meeting, a generous check to AOS for the purpose of attracting quality speakers for our meetings. Thank you, Hal Smith, and Wild Birds Unlimited of Auburn, for your continued support of AOS.

New Members

Richard & Debra Beil

Robert Boliek

Virginia Boliek

Don Brownlow

Nancy Chapman

Diane Eileen

Verner & Harriett Guthrie

Mark & Mary Ann Gwin

Craig Litteken

Carla Ostrand

Clare Shannon

Roy and Melissa Turrentine

Linda and James Wakefield

Ben Wilson

Vicky Wilson

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Summer 2024

May 10, 2024

Fall 2024

August 10, 2024

Winter 2024

November 10, 2024

2024 AOS Winter Meeting Compilation List, Joe Wheeler State Park, January 26-28

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE WEEKEND WERE LESSER Black-backed Gull, Neotropic Cormorant, and Lapland Longspur. Count total was 109 species.

Snow Goose
Ross's Goose
Greater White-fronted-
Goose
Canada Goose
Tundra Swan
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
Mallard
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Greater Scaup
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Wild Turkey
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Mourning Dove
American Coot
Limpkin
Sandhill Crane
Whooping Crane
Killdeer
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Snipe
Spotted Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Bonaparte's Gull
Laughing Gull
Franklin's Gull
Ring-billed Gull

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

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

Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle
Orange-crowned Warbler
Palm Warbler
Pine 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.

Upcoming Meetings

SPRING MEETING—April 19–21, 2024

Dauphin Island, Alabama

FALL MEETING—October 11–13, 2024

Dauphin Island, Alabama

WINTER MEETING—January 24–26, 2025

Location TBD

A Cackling Goose First

By KEN HARE

SOMETIMES AN OFFHAND REMARK PAYS big dividends.

I love talking about birds, but I realize that most people don't care as much for listening about them. So, I try—often unsuccessfully, as my non-birding friends will attest—to limit my discussion of my birding habits to my fellow birders.

But there is one place I know my bird talk will receive a warm welcome—my dentist's chair. My dental hygienist, Karen Rector, always asks, "Have you seen any good birds lately?" And she seems to genuinely enjoy telling me about the birds she sees on her beautiful property in south Montgomery County. I hear about the Bald Eagles that sometimes visit the large lake on her property, or the Screech Owl that can occasionally be seen, or the Canada Goose with the injured foot that still seems to hold its own with the large flock of Canada Geese that regularly visits her lake.

So a couple of months ago, as I was preparing to leave, I casually mentioned, "Since you have so many Canada Geese, you should keep an eye open this winter for what looks like a miniature version of a Canada Goose." I told her about Cackling Geese, which look much like a Canada, but are only about one-half to one-third the size. I emphasized that she wasn't likely to find one, because they only rarely show up in Alabama. I said it was worth checking. But honestly, I didn't expect it to happen.

Then at the end of January, I received an email from Karen asking about a small goose mixed in with her Canada Geese. It contained photos from her phone, but I really couldn't tell for certain it was a Cackling Goose. But I did see enough to know I had to check.

Within minutes of arriving at her property, I knew that she was onto something. Even from a distance, I could tell that this was at the very least a hybrid, and probably a Cackling Goose. After taking some photos to give me a closer look at the bill—shorter and stubbier than the bill of a Canada—I



A Cackling Goose (Branta hutchinsii) is dwarfed by a Giant Canada Goose. (Branta canadensis maxima). (Bob Reed)

was 99 percent sure it was a Cackling Goose and not a hybrid. I quickly emailed pics to some birding friends I thought would have more experience with Cackling Geese, and they quickly responded to verify my identification.

Better yet, I soon found out it was the first report ever of a Cackling Goose in Montgomery County. Karen and her husband Tom graciously allowed a couple of groups of birders to visit for a closer look at the bird. A few others were able to scope it from the county road. By the time you are reading this, it is likely that "Cackie," as it has been dubbed, will have set off on migration to Cackling Goose breeding grounds on the northernmost strips of land in Canada and Alaska. But who knows? Maybe next winter it will be back.

North Alabama Young Birders Club News

By AVA LYERLY



ORTH ALABAMA YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB (NAYBC) had a successful first year in 2023. So, what is next for this 'fledging' bird club for 2024, you ask?

The club will be focusing on community science and service projects that benefit conservation and our community. Bluebird house plans were distributed at our last meeting for each member to construct. Some houses will set up in their yards for nest watching, while other houses will be given to Oakville Indian Mounds to replace their old bluebird houses. The club resolved to always bring garbage bags on our bird walks for trail cleanup. Also, we have some exciting speakers lined up for 2024. Club members have other ideas like creating an informative NAYBC handout, bird food drive, and setting up a public bird feeding station. We cannot wait to see where this goes!

Here are some helpful tips to start your own local Young Birders Club (YBC):

- Identify your objectives;
- Gather resources to use, hand out and refer to;
- Plan fun and engaging activities as well as guest speakers and educators;
- Establish your location, time, and purpose;

Members and friends of the North Alabama Young Birders Club on a 2023 field trip. (Ava Lyerly)

- Secure a free location to meet periodically;
- Establish a common meeting time that best fits your targeted attendees' schedules;
- Establish means of advertising and interclub communication;
- Advertise with flyers, social media, Alabama Audubon/AOS or other large birding organizations;
- Communicate with the club through email, secure social media apps, etc.;
- Prepare for your first meeting/organize regular bird walks and service projects;
- Have topics prepared or guest speakers, fun interactive games for everyone;
- Schedule at least one monthly bird walk and/or service project.

Please share this with anyone interested in starting a YBC! Let's see how many Young Birder Clubs we have in Alabama this time next year!! For more information email cdlyerly@gmail.com.

AOS SPRING MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, APRIL 19-21, 2024

AOS Spring Meeting Schedule



UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL AOS SPRING Meeting events, including field trips, will start at the Dauphin Island Community Center, 412 Lemoyne Drive. All activities are casual.

FRIDAY, APRIL 12

6:00 p.m. Board meeting: Via Internet

FRIDAY, APRIL 19

- 6:30 a.m.** Drew Haffenden leads our regular field trip to Splinter Hill Bog for Bachman's Sparrow and the wonderful pitcher and other carnivorous plants of this Nature Conservancy/AL DCNR significant protected area. Where: Green Park across from Community Center
- 5:30 p.m.** Registration/Social hour at Community Center
- 6:00 p.m.** Member Social—Light hors d'oeuvres
- 6:45 p.m.** Announcements and Discussion of Week end Field Trips
- 7:00 p.m.** Nathan Pieplow workshop on bird sounds and birding by ear.

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

- 6:30 a.m. Field Trips**
- 1) Exploring Dauphin Island** with Nathan Pieplow. Where: Green Park across from Community Center
- 2) Pelican Island with Drew.** Please Note: beach birds have been reduced in numbers over the last 18 months. If this continues to be the case this outing will also include other hotspots on Dauphin Island.
- 8:00 a.m. Delta Boat Trip**
Where: Meaher State Park boat ramp. Limit of 6, extra charge. See page 13 for details.
- 11:30 p.m.** Jennie's Famous Lunch—Lunch at the home of Jennie Stowers. Jennie will provide all food.

5:30 p.m. Registration, Social Hour, Banquet, and Keynote Speaker, Community Center

6:30 p.m. Banquet Buffet

7:15 p.m. Announcements and Discussion of Field Trip sightings

7:30 p.m. Keynote Speaker: Nathan Pieplow.

SUNDAY, APRIL 21

6:30 a.m. Field Trip: Blakely Island if scouting indicates good birding there otherwise an island mop-up. Where: Green Park across from Community Center. NOTE: See additional information and instructions on page 13.

Noon Compilation (All bird sightings in Mobile and Baldwin Counties from Friday, April 19 to noon, April 21, 2024.) 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)

AOS SPRING MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, APRIL 19-21, 2024

Spring Meeting Field Trips



ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST EMAIL ANDREW 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 19, 2024

BALDWIN COUNTY BIRDS AND BLOOMS

Leader: Drew Haffenden

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

Meeting Place: Green Park opposite the Community Center

We will 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 a.m.–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 20, 2024

EXPLORING DAUPHIN ISLAND

Trip Leader: Nathan Pieplow and Local leader

Meeting Time: 6:30 a.m.

Meeting Place: Green Park opposite the Community 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 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: Drew Haffenden

Meeting Time: 6:30 a.m.

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

Join Dauphin Island 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. Note: This trip is planned, but bird activity has recently been very quiet at this usually very productive site. Should there be few birds on the beach other island hotspots will be added to this outing.

DELTA BOAT TOUR (Private Trip)

Trip Leader: Ben Raines

Meeting Time: 8:00 a.m.

Meeting Place: Boat ramp, Meaher State Park

Cost: \$150 per person

AOS is offering a private trip limited to six people as one of our Saturday morning outings. Unlike other outings, there is a charge of \$150 per person. This includes drinks and snack on board. Due to this being a busy time of the year we need full payment made by March 10.

Ben Raines, your captain and guide, is author of *America's Amazon* and producer of the documentary of the same name. He found the remains of the *Clotilda*, the last ship to bring slaves to America, sunken in the Delta. Ben's boat trips into the delta explore the flora and wildlife. In spring things are blooming intensely and the alligators are out and about. The trip lasts about six hours, with most of the time spent creeping around with a silent electric motor in remote nooks and crannies of the Delta.

The meeting time is 8:00 a.m. at the Meaher State Park boat ramp, which is at the very end of the main park road through the chain link fence. Park in the designated area only. Return will be about 2:00 p.m. There is a cooler on board if you wish to bring lunch, or you can bring a small cooler of your own. It can get cool on the water when the boat is doing one of the few fast runs so a wind/rain jacket is recommended. Other than rain it does not get wet inside the boat.

Registration is by check only! Make checks payable to AOS, and mail to 3590 Eagle Nest, Opelika, AL 36801. No

PayPay registration. Contact aosbirdstreasurer@gmail.com to see if the trip is still open.

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024

BLAKELEY ISLAND MUDLAKES

Trip Leader: Larry Gardella

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

Meeting Place: Community 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: 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. This is the location of the over-wintering White Wagtail, still present at the time of this writing. 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 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.

IMPORTANT NOTE: A permit form MUST be lodged with the State Docks Authority prior to your arrival and the permit displayed inside the windscreen. It will not be necessary to call in advance. Go to <http://www.aosbirds.org/alabama-birding/blakeley-island/> to register in advance. Registration is valid for the rest of the calendar year.

AOS SPRING MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, APRIL 19-21, 2024

Meet the Speaker: Nathan Pieplow

NATHAN PIEPLOW got started identifying bird songs by studying the classic Peterson "Birding By Ear" field guides. It wasn't until 2003, when he faced the frustrations of studying sounds for his first trips to Mexico and Costa Rica, that he became dedicated to finding new and better ways to learn, describe, and catalog bird sounds. Along the way he became a sound recordist and an amateur ethologist (a student of animal behavior).

Nathan is not one of those superhuman beings who can identify every singing bird. To learn bird sounds, he wanted more resources: more recordings, better glossaries, deeper discussions, so he set out to create his own resources. Nathan is the author of the two-volume Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds, and is a member of the board of directors of the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.

Nathan lives in Boulder, Colorado, where he teaches writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado. He's a former editor of the quarterly journal *Colorado Birds* and one of the developers of the Colorado County Birding Website and the Colorado Birding Trail.

Bird Sounds, Alabama, and Me

By NATHAN PIEPLOW

FIRST OF ALL, LET ME EXPRESS HOW EXCITED and grateful I am to be invited to speak to the AOS spring 2024 meeting. I have heard stories of legendary Dauphin Island, but I have never visited—and I am particularly thrilled to experience it at the height of spring migration. My home state of Colorado doesn't have many warblers! (We make up for it in ways that range from longspurs to rosy-finches to grouse.) This will be my first time officially birding Alabama. I say "officially" because I do have a single bird on my Alabama eBird life list.

The first time I visited Alabama was during my senior year of college in 1998. My friends and I had conceived of a mad-cap five-day road trip all the way from our campus in western Massachusetts to Mardi Gras in New Orleans and back.

I was thrilled by the plan in part because I had never been to the South. I'd grown up in South Dakota and gone to col-

lege in New England. A birder since childhood, I knew there wasn't going to be much opportunity for birding at Mardi Gras, but I resolved to keep my eyes peeled along the way.

We drove through the night, reaching Chattanooga at daybreak. I started a driving shift through Alabama on the interstates. It was my first time seeing magnolia trees. Broad green leaves in the wintertime? It felt exotic and tropical.

I scanned the roadsides as I drove, and it paid off. Somewhere in Greene County, a huge bird flapped out of a roadside tree and flew right over the car: my first-ever Black Vulture. It was the first lifer of the trip.

The following day, in Louisiana, I did manage to sneak away for an hour of birding and got some more lifers ranging from Laughing Gull to Carolina Chickadee. Oh, for those early days of birding in a new place, when even the most common birds are brand new and exciting!

At the meeting, I'll be talking about my favorite part of birding: the amazing sounds of birds. In the Friday evening workshop, I'll explain how to make the most of your smartphone. You can use free apps to record birds, share your recordings online, and auto-identify the birds you are hearing. If you already have favorite apps, bring them—and if you've never recorded or identified sounds with your phone, we will get you set up. We will pay particular attention to Merlin Sound ID.

At Saturday's keynote, "The Language of Birds," I'll discuss what birds are actually saying to one another, and how we know. During our short lessons on bird language, you'll learn common phrases in Red-winged Blackbird ranging from "I love you" to "honey, I'm heading out for a bit." You'll learn how to say "I've found food" in Cliff Swallow, and how to say almost anything in Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Other questions I'll be answering: What bird species has the largest vocabulary of any species in the world, as far as we know? (It's not the Mockingbird!) What North American bird species is the most vocally interesting? How can a language convey meaning when the words mean nothing?

I am very much looking forward to meeting all of you, and the birds of your beautiful state!

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