

# THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 45, NO. 3 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY FALL 2025

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

FOUNDED 1952



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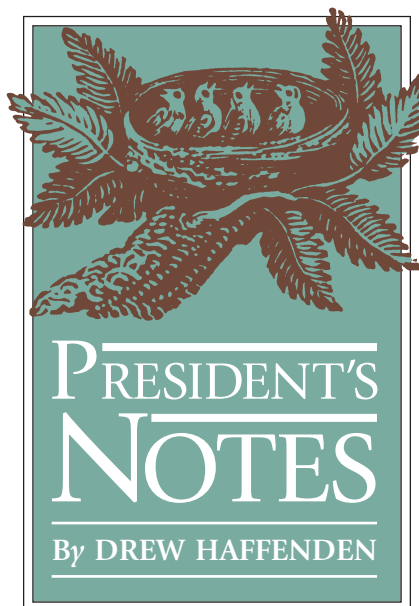
### MEETINGS

Patsy Russo



AS MY POSITION AS PRESIDENT ends at the end of the October meeting this is my last President's Message. Looking

back over the last two years, I believe the Board and members have maintained AOS as a strong society in the face of the technological age challenges that societies of all stripes have faced over the last ten years or so. This age has brought tools such as app-based ID including Merlin, eBird, private apps, and online ID sites. In my opinion, while these have offered instant gratification, the skills necessary to identify birds, and the knowledge that there are similar birds to the one an app may be showing, is being lost to new birders. Most apps and online sites fail to explain why the ID was made, and why it was not something similar. Picking through features and using a book-style field guide that displays several similar birds in the same view meant one's own brain was doing the work, which is necessary for learning. This new approach is fundamentally just listing, rather than getting to know and understand birds. Behavior is rarely mentioned for example, though experienced birders often use it along with microhabitat—in the canopy, stationary within, stationary on a bare branch, foraging around grass clumps on the dry part of the beach, or running down into a receding wave then retreating up the beach with the next one. I was recently birding with a newer birder in the west who was using Merlin to suggest birds; I kept saying "it can't be that because the bird in question would never be seen foraging on the ground in grass," for example. While I was looking the other way at a rocky creek he asked, "what's this gray bird?" I asked where, he said "on a rock." I immediately said "Dipper!" (a bird we had been looking for). All he had done was describe behavior and I knew the microhabitat. That saved a lot of time looking through Merlin for small to medium gray birds. This is where our Society and its members are invaluable—helping birders understand the wider picture of how to ID birds, and why they are interesting, other than as a tick on a list. I'm sure even the most experienced of us will pick up tips along these lines with our speaker at



the meeting. I recently heard a statement with which I totally agree: Every time we use artificial intelligence, we become a little less talented.

Putting on two hats, I would like to thank AOS for supporting Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries (DIBS) over the years, including the very recent purchase of two large center lots near our other lots on General Gorgas Street. The AOS Articles of Incorporation specifically say as one of our purposes: "To acquire nature centers, natural areas, or other real property with habitat critical to migrant or resident birds." We are fortunate to have DIBS as the vehicle by which we can do this, taking the burden off AOS. We are more fortunate

in having a membership with the foresight to support this purpose; thank you.

Alabama Audubon, with whom we share many members, has acquired the rights to Alabama Birdfest, and invited AOS to consolidate Birdfest with the October AOS weekend. However, the AOS board determined that it would, among other things, stress Dauphin Island habitat and our volunteer organization, and declined with our thanks.

Lastly, I welcome Dr. Shirley Farrell as our new President. Shirley had been an important part of AOS and its Board for many years, impressively and single-handedly building our educational outreach (also a purpose in our Articles). Shirley has numerous ideas to help sustain and grow AOS, and I know her dedication to birds and conservation will see AOS thrive under her leadership. Welcome Shirley.

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### *Thanks for the Stories*

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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.

# Gulf Pelagic Trips

BY LARRY GARDELLA

**T**HE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY TOOK boats into the Gulf of Mexico fairly regularly in the 1980s, 1990s, and early aughts. Some trips brought us a few special birds very rarely seen from land, but we spent most of the time getting to and returning from the deep water 50 or 60 miles from shore. We then found a captain with a boat that could get us out deep quite quickly and we had a bit more luck. When we found an interesting bird, we could chase it down for good looks—and the captain enjoyed it. On August 18, 2001, I was among the birders that enjoyed having a Red-billed Tropicbird fly right over our heads.

Unfortunately, not long after the tropicbird trip, we lost access to the fast boat, and pelagic trips became scarce. Jump forward to August 2024, when Mason Currier put together a trip on a fast fishing boat and we saw a very nice mix of shearwaters (including Alabama's first Scopoli's), several jaegers, and groups of phalaropes.

Interest in seeing what was out in the gulf was piqued. Then, Cynthia Freeman talked with one of her neighbors on Dauphin Island who had a fast boat that he chartered for fishing trips, Jerry Whisenhunt of Minutes of Use. He was willing to try a birding trip. Mason assembled a group of birders, and I signed on as an alternate. Fortunately for me, one of the people who signed on could not make it, so I became a passenger. Captain Jerry was so excited to be doing this different trip that he worked hard to get the boat in tip-top shape. Unfortunately, he overtightened one gasket, so when we were 40 miles or so from shore (having seen a Brown Booby and a Wilson's Storm-Petrel), we were down an engine. The captain made a call and got the parts he needed for a quick repair, but it took the boat several hours to reach us. While we waited, we went back and forth along chum lines and had close-up looks at more storm-petrels; we ended up seeing all three Alabama water species. After we were back to full engine power, we chased down a Cory's Shearwater and had great looks at it just a few feet away. When we were passing Fort Morgan and almost back to the dock, we encountered 2,000 Black Terns. In among them were two dozen Common Terns and



a strikingly white tern that Andrew Lydeard photographed, documenting an exceedingly rare Roseate Tern, a lifer for many on board and an Alabama first for all. A trip report is at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/403243>. The day after our trip, the captain was out with a fishing party and saw a Pomarine Jaeger fly over his boat. He is getting hooked on birds.

Most of the same people signed up for an August 14 pelagic, again with Jerry Whisenhunt, and I again was an alternate. Someone had to cancel, so I was able to go. This time, we knew that there would be no mechanical problems—and there weren't. Just birds (and flying fish, jumping Yellowfin Tuna, and deepwater dolphins). We were barely out from shore when Daniel Redwine spotted a bird flying south high above us. It was probably a Mississippi Kite but may have been a jaeger; it went down as bird sp. Minutes later, a Red-necked Phalarope appeared from the East and cut right in front of our boat. We switched to hauling to the deep water. Once out there, we tracked down Magnificent Frigatebirds and found the smaller birds with them over schools of bait fish. Sooty Terns in the sky, shearwaters of four species sitting on the water; when they flew, underwing photos enabled us to separate Cory's and Scopoli's. Within seconds of chumming with fish oil, we had a Great Shear-





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: *Examples of some species seen on pelagic trips to the Gulf: Northern Gannet, Red-billed Tropicbird, and Cory's Shearwater* (All Wikimedia Commons)



water hit the water and even drop momentarily below the surface. It got close enough for selfies and phone videos. Two Pomarine Jaegers swept in shortly after the Great Shearwater did, and they stayed around the boat for quite some time, eventually being joined by a third. The day was cloudy, and we watched some small waterspouts forming in the clouds. One dropped to the water right near us, giving us a chance to watch a shearwater spinning in a light rain that was only a few feet across. We chased down two Brown Boobies (and later, a Northern Gannet rather close to shore), but a Masked Booby appeared well left of the boat and then flew right over us. It was an incredible show. The trip report is at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/403252>.

A comfortable, fast boat is available with a captain who enjoys the birds and knows how to find the bait fish that attract both the big fish he usually takes people to and a variety of pelagic birds. Get a group of seven people together, study the routes of the recent pelagic trips (and the birds!), and get hold of Jerry by texting 251-861-5302 or calling and leaving a message. You should be able to work out a date that works for your group and Jerry. If you are short of seven, you can always put a request for additional people on ALBirds. Then, go enjoy some very special birds.

AOS FALL MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, OCTOBER 10-12, 2025

# AOS Fall Meeting Schedule



UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL EVENTS WILL TAKE place in the Dauphin Island Community Center, 412 Lemoyne Drive. Casual attire throughout.

## FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3

**6:00 p.m.** AOS Board meeting: via TEAMS

## FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

- 7:00 a.m.** **Upper Delta Boat Trip** with Ben Raines  
(Fee: see *Field Trips*)
- 5:00 p.m.** Registration/Social hour at Dauphin Island Community Center
- 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.** Join Tom Stephenson, coauthor of *The Warbler Guide*, for a lecture and tutorial on faster ID of warblers using new details and a short history of technology and the North American Field Guide.

## SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11

- 7:00 a.m.** **Field Trip 1: Exploring Dauphin Island**  
Exploring Dauphin Island with speaker Tom Stephenson and AOS leader  
**Where:** Green Park (next to Ship & Shore)
- 7:00 a.m.** **Field Trip 2: Dauphin Island Causeway**  
Shorebirds, terns and gulls with Drew Haffenden (depends on current conditions)  
**Where:** Green Park (next to Ship & Shore)
- 5:15 p.m.** **Registration at Community Center**
- 5:30 p.m.** **BANQUET AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER**  
Dauphin Island Community Center
- 5:30 p.m.** Social Hour

- 6:30 p.m.** Banquet Buffet
- 7:20 p.m.** Membership meeting, election of officers
- 7:30 p.m.** Announcements and Discussion of Field Trips
- 7:40 p.m.** **Keynote Speaker: Tom Stephenson**  
Identifying fall warblers

## SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12

- 6:30 a.m.** **Field Trip: Blakeley Island Mudlakes**  
if scouting close to the date reveals it to be worthwhile. See Field Trips for important information.  
**Where:** Green Park (next to Ship & Shore)
- Noon** Compilation (Includes all bird sightings in Mobile and Baldwin Counties from Friday, October 10 to noon, October 12, 2025)  
**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](http://www.gulfinfo.com)

[www.townofdauphinisland.org/where-to-stay](http://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](http://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)

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### *Fall Meeting Field Trips*

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All participants must email Drew at [andrew@natsp.com](mailto:andrew@natsp.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, OCTOBER 10, 2025**

##### **Upper Delta Boat Tour with Ben Raines**

Trip Leader: Ben Raines

Meeting Time: 7 a.m.

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

Mound Island and the Giant Cypress. These are the trips where we hike in through the swamp to the 700-year-old giant cypress and visit the Indian mounds on Mound Island. We cover about 40 miles by boat on these trips and spend about half the trip off the boat in the woods. In October, two orchids are blooming, Bartram's tree orchid, a tiny tree dwelling species, and the lady's tress, a spiraling swamp orchid with a delicious aroma. Oyster mushrooms and honey mushrooms are plentiful on the walks, along with a lot of flowers. The flowers are particularly beautiful around then: ironweed, opposite leaf daisies, a lot of stuff. We will hike through meadows of flowers on the way to the tree. There are lots of birds, both resident and migrants. October and November are typically the driest months in the swamp, so best time to be walking around without getting your feet wet. Please note the round-trip distance to the Giant Cypress is two miles and to the Indian Mounds one mile, both flat and easy walking.

Bring a lunch and drinks. Cost is \$160 per person; max capacity is six persons, first come. Register with Drew at: [andrew@natsp.com](mailto:andrew@natsp.com).

#### **SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2025**

##### **Exploring Dauphin Island**

Trip Leader: Tom Stephenson and AOS leader

Meeting Time: 7 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. 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 Dauphin Island Causeway**

(Depending upon conditions; check with Drew on Friday.)

Trip Leader: Drew Haffenden

Meeting Time: 7 a.m.

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

The recently created shallow flats along the Dauphin Island Causeway have resulted in prime shorebird feeding and tern roosting areas. As this is a new site we do not know how it will be in mid-October but we should still be seeing shorebirds migrating through and residents using it. As there is limited (technically no) parking, carpooling is highly recommended. As it's only five minutes from Green Park, car poolers can easily be run back and the driver return.

#### **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2025**

##### **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 carpooling 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.

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.

**IMPORTANT:** 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.

### Upcoming Meetings

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**—Friday,  
Saturday, October 4, 2025, 5:00 p.m.

**FALL MEETING**—October 10–12, 2025  
Dauphin Island, Alabama

**WINTER MEETING**—January 23–25, 2026  
Lake Guntersville State Park Lodge

**SPRING MEETING**—April 17–19, 2026  
Dauphin Island, Alabama

### Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Winter 2025	November 10, 2025
Spring 2026	February 10, 2025
Summer 2026	May 10, 2026

### Membership Moment

**A**S MEMBERSHIP CHAIR, I HAVE SUGGESTED SEVERAL WAYS in which you could help AOS get new members. Without backing down from any of those suggestions, I believe that the best thing you can do is ask the people you bird with to join AOS if they are not already members. Not sure if they are members? I'd be glad to let you know if you email me at [lfgardella@gmail.com](mailto:lfgardella@gmail.com). If you learn that a birding buddy is not a member, please tell them about all the reasons to join AOS—or you may even want to surprise them with a gift membership. I appreciate all your efforts!

Remember that dues are for calendar years, but those that pay after October 1 are members for the next full year.

—Larry Gardella, Membership Chair

### 2026 AOS Winter Meeting

**P**LEASE STAY TUNED FOR OUR UPCOMING WINTER MEETING, which will be held from January 23 to 25, 2026, at Lake Guntersville State Park. We have some exciting plans, including opportunities to learn about ducks and raptors, as well as a few surprise guests and events that we think you will enjoy. More details will follow as we get closer to the date.

—Shirley J. Farrell, VP

### Honoraria and Acknowledgements

#### AOS DONATIONS

Bob and Pat Reed in memory of Alison Glascock

DAUPHIN ISLAND BIRD SANCTUARY DONATIONS  
Randall Frank

### Update Your Contact Information

**A**RE YOU MOVING? ARE YOU CHANGING INTERNET SERVICE Providers? Don't forget to send us your updated contact information. E-mail: [treasurer@aosbirds.org](mailto:treasurer@aosbirds.org)



AOS FALL MEETING, DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALABAMA, OCTOBER 10-12, 2025

# Meet the Speaker: Tom Stephenson

## *The Warbler Guide: The Overlooked ID Points That Make Identifying Fall Warblers Easy*

**O**UR WARBLERS ARE SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL birds in the world. But their beautiful colors often blind birders to many of their most important ID points.

And when some species don their drabber fall plumages, those overlooked ID points become the key to identifying them.

This talk discusses many of these very important but often overlooked ID points such as overall contrast, subtle facial features, color impressions, feather edging, rump contrast, and foraging style, location, and behavior.

And fortunately, viewing a warbler from below can reveal some of the most important ID points for many species. Learn how many tail and undertail covert patterns are, in fact, diagnostic alone or when combined with one other ID point.

Individual species, especially the most challenging to identify, will also be discussed with outlines of the important ID points, comparisons with similar species, and illustrations of how often disregarded partial views can be used to identify many of even the most challenging warbler species.

TOM STEPHENSON *has been birding since he was a kid under the tutelage of Dr. Arthur*

*Allen of Cornell University. His articles and photographs are in museums and many publications including Birding, Birdwatcher's Digest, Handbook of the Birds of the World, Handbook*

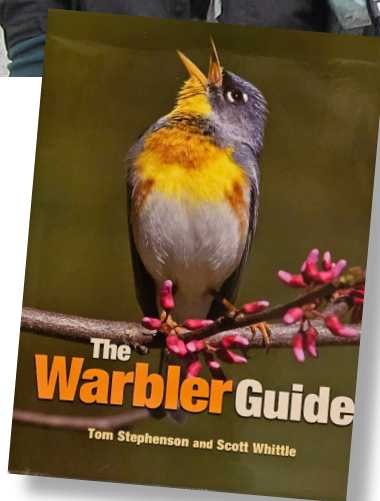
*of the Mammals of the World, Birds of Madagascar, and Guide to the Birds of SE Brazil.*

*Tom has lectured and guided many groups across the US as well as in Asia, where he trained guides for the government of Bhutan. He has donated numerous recordings of Eastern Himalayan rarities and other Asian species to Cornell's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds.*

*For several years he was on Zeiss's digiscoping team for the World Series of Birding; and in 2011 his and Scott's team won the World Series Cape Island Cup. In 2014 Tom and Scott set the US record for a Photo Big Day, taking pictures of 208 species in one 24-hour period.*

*His latest book, The Warbler Guide, is published by Princeton University Press, and recently won the National Outdoor Book Award. The Warbler Guide App, for iOS and Android, includes 3D rotating models and won the 2015 Design Award for the AAUP Book, Jacket and Journal Show.*

*His app, BirdGenie, is a "shazam" for bird song that helps bird enthusiasts identify over 150 common vocalizations in eastern and western US by recording them on their smart phone. Bird Genie won the prestigious PROSE award from the American Association of Publishers.*



## AOS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

*Your Membership Dues Support the Work of the Alabama Ornithological Society*

Please check membership category: \_\_\_\_ New Member \_\_\_\_ Renewing Member

Please check membership category: \_\_\_\_ Student \$10 \_\_\_\_ Individual \$25 \_\_\_\_ Family \$40\* \_\_\_\_ Sustaining \$50  
\_\_\_\_ Life (individual) \$350 \_\_\_\_ Life (family\*) \$550 \*Number of family members \_\_\_\_\_

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**Hal Smith, AOS Treasurer, 3590 Eagle Nest, Opelika, AL 36801**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**YOU CAN ALSO JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP ONLINE AT [WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG](http://WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG)  
PLEASE ADD 4% TO PAYPAL TRANSACTIONS**

## AOS FALL MEETING 2025 REGISTRATION FORM

*Complete and return to:*

**Hal Smith, AOS Treasurer, 3590 Eagle Nest, Opelika, AL 36801**

Telephone: (334) 329-8272 • Email: [aosbirdstreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:aosbirdstreasurer@gmail.com)

*Please make checks payable to AOS. Checks must be received by October 3, 2025*

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](http://WWW.AOSBIRDS.ORG)**

Registration @ \$25 per person	\$
Banquet Buffet @ \$30 per person	\$
<b>2026 DUES</b>	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
<b>TOTAL ENCLOSED</b>	\$

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
88838 TALLASSEE HIGHWAY  
TALLASSEE, ALABAMA 36078

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## THE YELLOWHAMMER

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Address correspondence concerning membership to:  
Hal Smith, AOS Treasurer  
3590 Eagle Nest  
Opelika, AL 36801  
Email: aosbirdstreasurer@gmail.com

#### Annual Membership:

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Sustaining: \$50 • Life (individual): \$350  
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<http://www.aosbirds.org>



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#### ALABAMA WILDLIFE CENTER

<http://www.awrc.org>

#### ALABAMA AUDUBON SOCIETY

<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>

#### SOUTHEASTERN RAPTOR REHAB CENTER

<http://www.vetmed.auburn.edu/raptor>

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