

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF EARLY FALL MIGRATION ON THE GULF COAST OF ALABAMA, 1959

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During the period from September 4 to 21, 1959, the writers studied vertebrate ecology on the Gulf Coast of Alabama. Among data collected was that relating to the migration and abundance of gulls, terns, wading and shorebirds. Most of the time was spent in the Gulf Shores vicinity, ranging from Alabama Point to Fort Morgan. The Mobile causeway was visited on September 18 and 19, with the morning of the 19th in the company of Dr. M. W. Gailliard of Mobile. Dauphin Island was studied September 19 (evening), 20 and 21 (morning).

The weather for this period was slightly variable. Winds were mostly easterly and afternoon thunder-showers occurred in the area. On September 10 to 13, there were strong winds from the northeast and over a 40 hour period about 20 inches of rain fell causing a considerable flooding of the lowlands.

Among the migrational observations it was noted that each morning a flight of gulls and terns came to the Gulf Shores coast from the west and each evening they would make their return flight. These birds flew fairly low over the beach and water. On September 6, 7 and 8, in the evenings with the wind blowing from the north and northeast, additional flights of gulls and/or terns were seen. These flights occurred late enough and high enough so that no indentifications, other than that they were gulls and terns, could be made. A group of these birds would suddenly appear from the east at a fairly high altitude, soaring and circling upward until they finally reached an altitude of about 2,000 feet. Then in a group they would fly directly south or southwest. On September 9, the wind shifted to the west and thereafter none of these migrational groups was seen.

Few shorebirds were seen at the beginning of the study. Actually, a few Sanderlings and one Ruddy Turnstone were the only ones seen the first several days. On September 8, the writers collected a male Buff-breasted Sandpiper that was in company with 4 Least Sandpipers, 3 Semipalmated Sandpipers and a Snowy Plover. A Dowitcher and 2 Willets were nearby. Interestingly enough, the Buff-breasted Sandpip-

er lacked subcutaneous fat, which is a good indication that it had just arrived in migration. On September 9, several Semipalmated Plovers appeared. These could have come from Dauphin Island since the wind was westerly and strong. After the period of heavy rain (Sept. 10-13) with strong northeasterly winds, the shorebirds increased in numbers and kinds. On September 14, a Knot was collected.

Following is given an annotated list of the birds to show not only their presence and approximate numerical status but also some implications of migration.

Brown Pelican. Seen most days at Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island in small numbers, 20 being the largest group seen.

White Pelican. Seen along the causeway at Mobile September 18 and 19. At least 200 were in the group. Dr. Gailliard indicated that they had been there some time.

Great Blue Heron. Several seen each day. On September 16 and 17, a group of 20 congregated at the pass from the Gulf Shores lagoon.

Common Egret. Less abundant than Great Blue Herons. Most common along the Mobile causeway.

Snowy Egret. Seen on all areas but uncommon.

Louisiana Heron. Seen at Gulf Shores and at Dauphin Island but less common than the Snowy Egret.

Little Blue Heron. Seen on all areas but most abundant at Mobile; 6 being seen.

Green Heron. Present but uncommon.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Seen on all areas; 2 being the most seen in one day.

Least Bittern. Two seen at Gulf Shores and one at Mobile.

Green-winged Teal. Eight seen at Mobile September 18; 6 the next day.

Blue-winged Teal. Three seen at Gulf Shores September 7 and for most of the following days until the 18th.

Clapper Rail. Present on all areas. Most abundantly heard on Dauphin Island.

Florida Gallinule. Fifteen seen along the causeway at Mobile.

Piping Plover. Ten seen at Gulf Shores September 11. Twenty were seen in a group at Dauphin Island.

Snowy Plover. A few individuals seen at Gulf Shores and at Dauphin Island.

Semipalmated Plover. Three seen at Gulf Shores September 9. On Dauphin Island they equalled the Piping Plovers.

Black-bellied Plover. One to several seen at Gulf Shores each day after September 11. About twice that number was seen each day on Dauphin Island.

Ruddy Turnstone. Several seen daily at Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island.

Spotted Sandpiper. Several seen in the Gulf Shores area.

Solitary Sandpiper. Uncommon. One collected at Gulf Shores, September 12.

Willet. Uncommon. Several seen on each area.

Greater Yellow-legs. Six seen and one collected on Dauphin Island, September 21.

Lesser Yellow-legs. One seen along the Mobile causeway, September 19, and several seen on Dauphin Island on the 20th.

Knot. One collected at Gulf Shores, September 14.

Least Sandpiper. Four to 6 commonly at Gulf Shores after September 8; 20 or more were seen at Dauphin Island.

Dowitcher. One seen at Gulf Shores, September 8 and 11; 4-6 present on Dauphin Island.

Semipalmated Sandpiper. Three or 4 present at Gulf Shores starting September 8. About 40 were present on Dauphin Island.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper. A male collected, September 8, at Gulf Shores.

Sanderling. Common at Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island. The largest group was seen on September 17, at dawn, when a group of about 25 was seen at the lagoon pass at Gulf Shores.

Herring Gull. A few at Gulf Shores and about 15 at Dauphin Island.

Ring-billed Gull. About 10 at Dauphin Island.

Laughing Gull. The most common gull at Gulf Shores and equal to the Ring-billed at Dauphin Island.

Forster's Tern. Several on all areas.

Common Tern. Ten seen at Gulf Shores, September 16. Several were collected.

Least Tern. Several were seen at Gulf Shores; one

collected. Several were also present on Dauphin Island.

Royal Tern. Seen but not common at Gulf Shores. A group of 200-400 was present at Dauphin Island.

Cabot's Tern. Fairly common at Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island. One hundred could be seen at either area in a day.

Caspian Tern. About 20 were present at Dauphin Island.

Black Tern. The abundant tern at Gulf Shores where more than 1,000 were seen each day. There were a few at Mobile and Dauphin Island.

Black Skimmer. Most abundant at Dauphin Island where 100 or more were seen. There were a few seen at Gulf Shores and a group of about 20 seen at Fort Morgan.

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