

Why is not more money appropriated for research upon the effects of such chemicals to people, livestock, poultry, birds, and animals? Although ten to twelve millions of dollars now have been appropriated by state legislatures and the Congress for the fire ant program alone, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services receives only \$280,000 for research upon pesticides and wildlife this fiscal year!

The Food and Drug Administration needs more inspectors to examine milk, meat, fruit, and vegetables for heptachlor content in order to prevent shipments containing chemical residue, and thus to safeguard our children and ourselves. How can these foods be free of contamination when broadcasting of heptachlor continues so unnecessarily?

—The fire ant program has been found to be disastrous to many organisms—**WHY**

#### **SHOULD IT BE CONTINUED?**

—HAROLD S. PETERS  
Research Biologist  
National Audubon Society

### "PASS THE BERRY"

One of the bird thrills of this season of the year is the hundreds of Cedar Waxwings which move in to clean up the berries. I recently observed two sitting on a limb. They were playing "pass the berry." The passage of the berry was so rapid the eye could not detect the passage, but would see the berry appear first in one beak then in the other. I watched for several minutes and the berry must have passed several hundred times without a single fumble.

—JENKINS JACKSON, Livingston, Alabama

### PROTHONOTARY WARBLER PARASITIZED BY COWBIRD

On August 23, 1959, a female Prothonotary Warbler was observed feeding a young Brown-headed Cowbird along the bank of Mountain Fork Creek where it empties into Flint River fifteen miles northeast of Huntsville. The area is low, often flooded, and bears a very lush growth.

The Prothonotary is the only eastern warbler that nests in a tree cavity, yet the Brown-headed Cowbird parasitizes it. This is the first known for Alabama.

I remember Prothonotaries nesting in tin cans put up during the 1940's by Mrs. T. A. Wigginton of Nashville, Tennessee. Mrs. Wigginton had to remove regularly the eggs of persistent cowbirds. If the eggs were not removed, the warblers would sometimes build over them. Sometimes they desert the nest, but usually would rear the young cowbirds.

—MARGARET L. ROBINSON

Ed. note—Other Alabama cowbird victims include: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, White-eyed, Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, Blue-winged, Parula, and Hooded Warblers, American Redstart, Summer Tanager, and Indigo Bunting. We urge members to be on the lookout for additional hosts this spring and report them on these pages.

### KRIDER'S RED-TAILED HAWK

This bird spent practically the entire winter of 1959 in the vicinity of my farm. I saw him on any number of occasions both flying and perched. On one occasion he was circling above me while two Crows dive-bombed him. I did not see a hit, but it had taken place as some of his large feathers were crushed and displaced. I have noticed in other instances that local birds seem to recognize a rare foreigner and resent his presence, and this itself becomes an aid in identification.

—JENKINS JACKSON, Livingston

### REGIONAL WINGBEATS

DECATUR—Late fall and winter settled on the Valley and Yankee cold fronts moved in with clocklike regularity. Shallow backwaters iced over, and there were spittings of snow and sleet, but none that remained on the ground for more than a few hours, until the real storm of Feb. 13 & 14.

Wheeler Refuge continued to feel the continental water fowl shortage. In late December, Canada Geese reached a peak of 28,000, dropping about 10 per cent below normal numbers. Some 800 Blue Geese and 50 Snow Geese stayed for the winter. Ducks finally came to a peak of about 40,000 in early January, still a third below the count for the 1958-59 season. All diving ducks were scarce, but percentagewise, Black Ducks increased. On December 30, David Hulse and a hunting companion shot down a pair of Blue-winged Teal, both in full breeding plumage. Blue-wings aren't supposed to winter in the Tennessee Valley, but there are always a few ignorant ones who haven't read the books.

At least three partially albino Canada Geese used refuge fields. One freakish bird had the normal body coloration of a Canada, but a completely white head and neck, possibly a Blue Goose-Canada Goose hybrid.

Bonaparte's Gulls and Horned Grebes were seen throughout most of the period. On January 4, David Hulse spotted an adult Franklin's Gull, the second record for this locality, near the Decatur boat harbor.

The find of the period was a Golden Eagle, the first local record. One was sighted by David Hulse on December 19, another, possibly the same bird, by Paul Robinson, Henry Grammer, and Homer Blackwood on December 26. In both cases, observers had a close view of the bird and could detect the feathered shanks. We have suspected, that some of the immature Bald Eagles seen locally each winter were really goldens, but these were the first solid records.

—THOMAS Z. ATKESON, P. O. Box 1643, Decatur, Alabama

HUNTSVILLE—The report from this area is rather commonplace, but this is usually true during the winter season. The territory covered in the reports from Huntsville usually includes Monte Sano and the country north and east, a sector with a 15-mile radius stretching from southwest of New Market to Gurley. Occasionally, observations are made from Gurley south to the Tennessee River, and once or twice during a season, the country to the west, from Huntsville to Decatur, is covered. An average of 8 hours each Saturday is spent in actual observation and approximately 100 miles of road distance is traveled.

Of the birds not seen in other seasons, the following have been sighted this winter: Marsh Hawk—common, Pigeon Hawk—1 sighted—Redstone Arsenal, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker—common, Brown Creeper—occasional, Winter Wren—uncommon, Hermit Thrush—occasional, Ruby-crowned Kinglet—common, Golden-crowned Kinglet—common, Water Pipit—1 flock at Wheeler Refuge, Cedar Waxwing—occasional flocks, Myrtle Warbler—common, Rusty Blackbird—common, Purple Finch—common, Pine Siskin—rare, Savannah Sparrow—common, Vesper Sparrow—uncommon, Slate-colored Junco—common, White-crowned Sparrow—occasional (fewer than last year), White-throated Sparrow—common, Fox Sparrow—occasional, Lincoln's Sparrow—1 sighted 10 miles north of Huntsville, Swamp Sparrow—common, Song Sparrow—common, Lapland Longspur—3 in flock with Horned Larks at Wheeler Refuge.

—JIM and MARGARET ROBINSON, 1701 Oakwood Ave., N. E., Huntsville, Ala.

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GADSDEN—Little of interest to report. I've been looking for those elusive Evening Grosbeaks, but can't find them in areas they used two years ago. On Dec. 24, Naomi Banks saw a pair just south of Hammondville, Ala. On Jan. 19, Dr. Paul Stewart (from local F. & W. office) saw 11 on a farm 13 miles south of Gadsden. On Feb. 11, Bill Bates saw one male "somewhere on a country road on Sand Mountain."

I had the usual large numbers of feeders during the worst of the snow storm, Feb. 13 and 14. There were very few Juncos in comparison to large flocks in winters past. No two seasons are alike. I drove to the airport recently to check on Lapland Longspurs. Some are showing quite a bit of color now.

—EDITH CLARK (MRS. BEN)  
2736 Hilltop Circle  
Gadsden, Alabama

BIRMINGHAM—An interesting variety of bird life was noted in connection with a wintering census and frequent netting activities on Robert's Field. (First state specimens of Smith's Longspur and Sprague's Pipit have been collected on this field). On January 16 about 7 p.m. a Barn Owl was noted in the auto headlights. Two Am. Woodcock were seen and heard on December 26, January 14 and 28, and one was in courtship flight on the last two dates which were warm, still evenings. Two Horned Larks visited the area on January 8. Six Short-billed Marsh Wrens were counted in 3-foot-high damp to wet broomsedge and were seen or heard on almost every visit. Four Grasshopper Sparrows were netted between January 14 and February 17. One had been banded March 25, 1959, recaptured June 7, 1959 as a singing male on breeding territory, and caught January 14 and 29. Because all captures were within 100 feet, it is probable that this bird was wintering on his breeding territory. Two Le Conte's Sparrows were noted December 26 and one January 15.

The birds on this field wintered well the cold spell of January 21-23 (41 consecutive hours below freezing with a low of 13 degrees F.) and the 3-inch snow of February 13-14. However neither Barn Owl nor Le Conte's Sparrow, both notably secretive species, have been seen since this severe weather. Robins began to frequent the area in flocks on January 26, but the first noticeable migration occurred February 15-16, immediately following the snow. At that time Common Snipe increased markedly, Water Pipits occurred in flocks, and a Vesper Sparrow was noted.

Eastern Meadowlark, Savannah Sparrow, and Field Sparrow are the most numerous residents of the field, and the last two were banded in quantity. By the next issue, banding figures for the whole winter will be available and we hope to have something interesting to present.

—THOMAS A. IMHOF  
307 38th Street  
Fairfield, Alabama

MONTGOMERY & CONSERVATION DEPT.—Short-eared Owls again took precedence over other birds during the mid-winter months in the Montgomery area. Eight of these birds could be flushed from their roosting site on Prison Farm No. 4 any time people wanted to observe them. The roosting site was located in an old wheat field under a dense stand of volunteer wheat. Pellets picked up in this area showed that small rodents and quite a few small birds composed the main part of their diet.

One of these owls was very light in color. It's color comparison was similar to a white leghorn chicken with a flock of Rhode Island Reds. This bird was collected February 3, 1960 and a scientific skin was made. In reading up on Short-eared Owls, it was found that certain old males moult in the winter months and the undersides of some individuals become immaculately white. This was the case in this specimen.

Ten research biologists working on predator control for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service visited the blackbird roost in Montgomery January 21, 22, and 23. The purpose of their visit was to try to out a new type net for use in catching and banding large numbers of Red-winged Blackbirds and Grackles, during the night when the birds were concentrated.

The net used was approximately 30 feet high, 50 feet wide, at the open end and approximately 100 feet deep at the closed end. When set up it resembles a hugh arch covered with netting which gradually tapers back to the closed end which is about eight feet high and ten feet wide.

Behind the net, five huge spotlights were set up, powered by a large generator. The experiment began about 8:00 pm on January 21. The biologists walked to the opposite end of the roost and began walking through the roost shouting and flashing lights, flushing the birds ahead of them. At this point, the five lights were turned on. Once the drivers approached close to the net, the birds were moving around by the tens of thousands. Many thousands of the birds flew into the nets in their attempt to get to the lights. Blackbirds began piling up in the back of the net near the lights to a depth of three feet. So many birds came to the back of the net that they completely blocked the forward rays of the lights. The men then dropped a curtain net about 15 feet forward of the lights which blocked the birds' exit.

Within one-half hour over 18,000 birds were caught. Of this number, approximately 10,000 were Starlings. The second most common were Brown-headed Cowbirds, while Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles ranked third and fourth. A few Rusty Blackbirds were also caught. It was interesting to note that no female Red-winged Blackbirds were caught. Apparently the sexes of these blackbirds roost separately. The trapped birds were driven into catch cages and sorted according to species. All Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Rusty Blackbirds were banded as were 1,000 Starlings.

Since Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles cause extensive damage in the rice belt of Arkansas, Louisiana and north Mississippi as well as considerable damage to the orchard crops in Virginia and other eastern states, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service has become concerned with this problem. Their biologists are working on life histories, migrations, methods of repelling and controlling these birds. It was evident that this netting technique could serve at least two major purposes. This method will provide information on migration and could also be used as a control measure where any pre-determined number of these birds could be exterminated without the use of deadly chemicals. Approximately 50,000 of these birds were caught in the three nights the experiment was performed.

—JAMES E. KEELER  
State Department of Conservation  
Montgomery, Alabama

MOBILE & THE GULF COAST—Our last field trip was made in freezing weather with snow falling, so you can be sure neither we nor the birds felt like getting in open spots. Even so, there has been a noticeable change in feather color and some of the early nesting species have already begun courtship.

A pair of Great Horned Owls are nesting again at Gulf Shores. My pair of "pet" Barred Owls have already begun housekeeping in my yard for the fourth consecutive year. Also, many ducks have paired off, preparing for the trip back North.

A pair of Brown-headed Nuthatches were building their nest in a dead tree on February 5. Carolina Wrens and Cardinals are singing their love songs; Red-bellied Woodpeckers are starting their mating antic, which is a very rapid hammering on the sweetest sounding tree they can find.

We regret to report that the colony of Sandhill Cranes which have wintered in southeast Baldwin County for the past several years seems to be further reduced in number. Last year they apparently numbered seventeen. This year reports indicate only fourteen, all adults.

Among our distinguished visitors this winter was another Bullock's Oriole, a female, reported on January 24 by our bird editor, George Carleton of Grove Hill, Ala. It was also seen by Mrs. Helms, another good birdwatcher of Grove Hill.

Father Dorn, S. J., of Spring Hill College has so recovered from his illness that he has been making regular field trips. On January 28, he found five Fox Sparrows, rather uncommon in this area. On February 5 he reported an unusual large group of Brewer's Blackbirds near the College. Also, a large flock of Purple Finches, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Slate-colored Junos and several Ground Doves were noted.

While banding last week I netted two White-throated Sparrows of interest. One had been banded in 1958 and the other in 1959. They were re-trapped in exactly the same spot.

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We have had enormous numbers of shorebirds including all the regulars, except the Brown Pelicans. A small hurricane which hit during their last breeding season played havoc. The extremely heavy loss of adults may be due to the fact they cannot go very long between meals. There is truth to the verse, "his bill can hold more than his belly can", and the duration of that storm didn't permit filling his bill for several days. I found many dead, washed up along the beaches of Petit Bois and other nearby islands.

On February 5, 6, and 7 we saw more than 100 Wild Turkeys at Choctaw Bluff. This shows what thirty years of careful game management can do. It can't be done without protection and many food patches. Can't wait till March 20 when the Spring gobbling season opens!

Hope to see all old and many new members at Monte Sano in April.

—M. WILSON GAILLARD, D.D.S.  
1508 Merchants Nat. Bank Bldg.  
Mobile, Alabama

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

Thanks to those of you who have sent in copy and to those who have expressed yourselves in reference to the last issue of Alabama Birdlife. Both the favorable and the constructively critical comments will spur me to serve you more efficiently in the future.

It comes to my attention from Adele West that there is a small Great Blue Heron Rookery just below Scottsboro, which does not appear on our cover cut.

With all the emphasis on the subject, did I once mention that dues are \$2.00 for active membership? My apologies. The treasurer clarifies the dues situation in this issue, and I promise I will not mention them next time editorially.

We are looking forward to a good meeting at Monte Sano, April 29-30, and May 1. We regret that final plans have not been completed as we go to press. Jim and Margaret Robinson know the area well, and birding should be very interesting at that time.

Because of the recent ice storm with its severe damage in the Monte Sano area, it is questionable how many cabins will be available for A.O.S. use in the park.

Accommodations will be available in motels nearby on the outskirts of Huntsville, where food may also be obtained. Headquarters and the Saturday night dinner meeting will also be in this area.

As soon as possible, and not later than April 20th, please send to Margaret Robinson your request for reservations, accompanied by a check for \$5.00 per person to confirm them. State whether you prefer park or motel accommodations and how many people will be in your party. She will make your reservation in advance, and give you any necessary information at that time.

No other general information bulletin will be sent, but Margaret will answer any question about local arrangements.

In spite of adverse weather conditions causing uncertainty of long range plans, we hope to see a large number of you there. Remember—make your reservations through Mrs. James C. Robinson, 1701 Oakwood Ave., N.E., Huntsville, Alabama, before April 20.

—BLANCHE H. CHAPMAN