

Kittinger, Robert Loftin, Eddie B. May, Louise McKinstry, Gordon M. Meade, Mrs. H. C. Miller, Margaret E. Miller, Elberta G. Reid, Jr., Pat A. Riley, James Shepherd, ROBERT W. SKINNER, Lib Toenes, L. A. WELLS, D. O. Wright, Harriett H. Wright.

1036 Pike Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35218

### THE SEASON WINTER 1969

Compiler and Editor—Thomas A. Imhof

The main event of this winter season was the invasion of northern finches. Read the details below under Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, Junco, and Fox Sparrow.

Almost universal in the state were a drought from June 1 to December 1, normal or near normal rainfall in January and February, and temperatures for over a year now averaging well below normal but with very few really cold days. The year 1968 in Birmingham at average 60.7 degrees was the second coldest of record. Our two coastal counties finished the year with barely half of normal rain, and water levels were as much as 2 feet below normal. Near Birmingham heavy December rains brought a smaller deficit much closer to normal, but still we had pipits and snipe instead of Horned Grebes and Buffleheads. Throughout the state low water levels were blamed for the scarcity of water birds.

For Christmas Count records—used as little as possible below—see Mr. Reid's excellent account in this issue.

Loons, Grebes—Common Loons were about normal at Lake Oliver on the Chattahoochee R. except that none were noted 2 Dec. to 2 Feb. (LAW). A few were noted at Wheeler Refuge (TZA), but only one was in Birmingham—25 and 26 Jan. (JRB et. al.) Mary Gaillard reports them not as numerous as usual on the coast. A maximum of 10 Horned Grebes were at Lake Oliver on 3 Dec. (LAW), but otherwise the species was scarce inland. Eared Grebes were noted for the 7th straight winter in the state as follows: Dauphin Island, 24 Nov. (MEM & MLR), earliest fall date; and twice at Chickasaw, 22 Dec. (REH, RWH & ERT) and 2 March (LPA & ERT).

Pelicanlike Birds—Brown Pelicans were reported three times—one on the Bon Secour Christmas Count, 21 Dec. (PFC) and at Dauphin Island on 14 Jan. and 20 Feb., no numbers (MAG et. al.). A maximum of 50 Gannets were off Dauphin Island on 20 Feb. (JLD & MAG) and in early February our only winter Magnificent Frigate-bird was spotted there (EBM).

Hérons, Ibises—A Green Heron on Dog R., Mobile, noted 11 times from 8 Jan. to 7 March (LMcK) is the 4th time in the last 12 years that the species has wintered on the coast. A Cattle Egret on Dauphin Island on 29 Dec. (fide MAG) is one of very few winter records for the state. Hundreds of Common Egrets were noted on 10 Dec. on Cochrane

Causeway (LMcK) and at Chickasaw on 2 March (ERT & LPA). A Yellow-crowned Night Heron at Marion Fish Hatchery on 25 Jan. and 1 Feb. (RRR and many others) is the 3rd inland winter record. A satisfactory photograph has been submitted for an adult Glossy Ibis present at Eufaula Refuge 1-16 Feb. (LAW, GS, SP, EC), the first inland winter record. A small flock of White Ibis on Dauphin Island on 19 Jan. (BMB) means the species has now been recorded on the coast in every month of the year.

Waterfowl—At Wheeler Refuge the Canada-Blue-Snow Goose peak this winter was 39,000, peak last winter 48,000, all-time peak 60,000 in 1963 (TZA). As for ducks at Wheeler, this winter's peak was 60,000 compared to 38,000 last winter. The Black Duck, Widgeon, and Shoveler were responsible for this increase while other duck species were down (TZA). Three Blue-winged Teal at East Lake, Birmingham on 8 March (RRR) are earliest for the Mountain Region by a week. Except for Wood Ducks in the Coastal Plain, the Ring-necked Duck appeared to be the only half-way common duck in much of Alabama, certainly around Birmingham and Marion. A male Greater Scaup was identified on 18 Jan. on Cochrane Causeway (REH & ERT); a few of these birds occur here and in Bon Secour Bay, but most of them prefer Mississippi Sound. On both sides of Mobile Bay ducks were reported extremely poor, even Red-breasted Mergansers (PFC, MAG).

Hawks—Bald Eagles were reported from Wheeler Refuge on 14 Dec. (adult fide TZA) and 16 Jan. (imm. fide TZA); from Birmingham on 16 Feb. (JNC); and from Eufaula Refuge about 10 Feb. (GS). A Golden Eagle captured near Evergreen in October 1968 is now a pet in Montgomery (RWS). Winter hawk movement is not confined to eagles; on the windy 28 Dec. in Birmingham several Red-tails, a Rough-legged, and 3 Marsh appeared to be in migration (TAI, JMI, WFC).

Shorebirds—In Birmingham 7 Am Woodcock were flushed on 28 Dec. (JNC, TAI, et. al.) and 5 were seen and heard, 3 of them in courtship flight, on 28 Feb. (TAI & JMI). A Lesser Yellowlegs was at Eufaula Refuge on 19 Jan. (LAW & EC). Least Sandpipers wintered at Wheeler (TZA) and Eufaula (LAW) Refuges, Birmingham (B.A.S.) and Marion (A.O.S.) Am Avocets, wintering at Cochrane Causeway for about 15 consecutive years now, peaked at 40 on 22 Dec. and 8 Jan. (JLD, LMcK, and many others).

Gulls—At Lake Oliver on the Chattahoochee R. 1-4 Herring Gulls were present daily; Ring-billed Gulls, 10-20 daily, maxima 67 on 28 Dec. and 125 on 2 March (LAW). Three adult and one immature Laughing Gulls, present at Lake Oliver 1-6 Dec. (LAW) constitute the only inland winter record. On the coast, these birds were noted with black heads on 20 Feb. (MAG & JLD). Bonaparte's Gulls were on Lake Harding, 15 miles north of Phenix City, 3-4 daily through 28 Dec. and a maxima of 25 on 9 Dec. (LAW).

Homed Lark, Purple Martin—A flock of over 250 Horned Larks delighted many A.O.S. members on 1 Feb. at Lakeland Farms near Marion. This open-country species appears to be doing well. The Purple Martin's annual race to beat the Starling to its nest boxes without dying from lack of insect food in cold weather was earlier than usual this year: 17 Jan. 4 or 5 and 19 Jan. a flock, both on Dauphin Island (BMB); 1 Feb., Marion (A.O.S.); 14 Feb., Chelsea, Shelby Co., 3 males (fide WFC); 17 Feb., Munford, Talladega Co., 1 found dead (JBC); 21 Feb., Montgomery (RWS); 22 Feb., Fayette County (DCH); Seale (RG); and 4 March, Wheeler Refuge (TZA).

Nuthatch, Wren, Thrushes, Waxwing—Although nowhere reported as numerous, the Red-breasted Nuthatch was widespread all the way to the coast with one bird even in The Tennessee Valley where natural pines are scarce—Hartselle at a feeder on 4 March

(Mrs. DP). A Short-billed Marsh Wren was near Hoover, Birmingham on 2, 3 & 4 Jan. (HHK, JNC, et. al.). Near Bon Secour on 27 Jan, the lowest of several counts of Robins in 5 acres of pine thicket was 30,000 (VDH & CLC). Near Birmingham the Robin suddenly became abundant on 31 Jan. and has remained so since. A late Wood Thrush was at a feeder on Shades Mt. on 14 Dec. (NGB). With the Robin, Hermit Thrush, Gray-cheeked Thrush (see Christmas Count), and E. Bluebird, 5 thrushes were in Birmingham this December. On the afternoon of 28 Jan., a careful estimate of a huge flock of Cedar Waxwings in 4 very large pecan trees in Fairhope comes to 3440 (VDH). As with the Robin, this species became abundant in Birmingham just after these coastal concentrations.

Warblers—Four Black-and-white Warblers on Dauphin Island on 9 March (LPA & ERT) had apparently not wintered locally. At least 4 Orange-crowned Warblers were in Birmingham this winter; 24, 25 Dec. and 1 March (RRR & EGR), 28 Dec. (JWS), 13 Jan. (TAI), and 20 March found dead after being present 2 weeks (Mrs. WEG). The Myrtle Warbler was exceptionally abundant on the coast in January and February; abundant on Dauphin Island through 9 March (MAG), tens of thousands on 23 Jan. near Bon Secour (VDH & CLC), abundant in Mobile and Baldwin Counties in late Feb. (JEK). Recently the Palm Warbler has been getting scarcer as a winter bird around Birmingham (missed on the '67 and '68 Christmas Counts) but one was in Hoover on 30 Dec. (HHK).

Blackbirds, Tanager—Reports from agricultural areas of the state indicate that blackbirds continue to increase, particularly where stock is fed in the open. No numbers are immediately available. The situation in Birmingham is relatively static, although occasional large flocks are seen. At least 2 Baltimore Orioles were at Birmingham feeders, 28 Dec. (MAS) and throughout period (JW), and a third at a Montgomery feeder since late November (RWL). A Summer Tanager at a Mobile bird bath on 12 Dec. (ERT) is the first winter record for Alabama.

Indigo Bunting and Dickcissel—An adult male Indigo Bunting at Foley on 21 Feb. (PFC) is our second winter record. At least 3 Dickcissels wintered, on the coast: one in Spring Hill 6 Dec. to 10 Jan. (ERT); another in Mobile 22 Dec. and 4 March (MWG); and one in Fairhope on 4 Feb. (VDH).

Evening Grosbeak—The headline species of the season made it as far south as the eastern shore of Mobile Bay. First noted for certain in Fairhope on 28 Dec. (Mrs. AS), the birds peaked there at over 100 and were still present on 11 March (VDH). This flock, or more of them, spread north to Spanish Fort (VDH) and south to Point Clear (EMMcG) with one bird in Spring Hill (fide MAG). Birds were present at Jackson, 30 Dec. to March, one specimen to Dept Cons Coll (WJH); Grove Hill (GWC); Dothan (MLH); Brewton (fide JEK); Clayton, 8 birds on 3 March (Dr RB); Seale, 13 Feb. onward (RG); Auburn, over 100 (JD & RD); Montgomery, throughout period (RWL, RWS, JEK); Talladega, 28 Nov. to at least 18 Dec. (VHA); Hartselle, 6 birds, 18 Dec. to at least 2 March (Mrs. DP). In Birmingham over 1500 birds visited at least 25 feeders throughout the period and over 150 have been banded (MLB, HHW, and assistants). A peak of 150 were at one station in Roebuck on 9 Feb. (GH).

Other Finches—The Purple Finch also invaded the coast in large numbers: Fairhope, 6 Dec. to at least 6 March, max 40 (VDH); Magnolia Springs, present through 4 March, largest number in 15 years (PFC); Mobile, about 40 banded on 4 Feb. (MEM & SRH). The Pine Siskin was even more abundant—Mobile about 200 on 14 Jan. (KJ & HJ); 40 of 100 banded on 4 Feb. (MEM & SRH); still present on 4 March (MAG); Foley and Fairhope in large numbers too (PFC & VDH). The Am Goldfinch also followed suit, and a large flock on the west end of Dauphin Island was estimated on 12 Jan. at 500 (GS & JS) and

on 19 Jan. at 600 (KJ & HJ). On 3 Jan. a strange bird, looking like a Savannah Sparrow but with a white wing patch, visited a feeder in Orrville near Selma. M. L. (Jack) Miles, well aware of what species he had, collected the bird on 6 Jan. and the identification was verified by George Lowery at L.S.U. as a LARK BUNTING, second record and first specimen for Alabama.

Sparrows—Three Grasshopper Sparrows were found at Gulf Shores on 18 and 19 Jan. (KRT, LPA, REH); and in Birmingham one was near Hoover 28 Dec to 5 Jan. (JNC, HHK, et. al.) and another was banded from a flock of Savannah Sparrows at Roberts Field on 26 Dec. (TAI). A Henslow's Sparrow was identified in Mobile on 14 Jan. (MWG). Juncos were reported as common throughout Mobile and Baldwin Counties (PFC, MAG, and many others). A Harris' Sparrow at a feeder in Hartselle on 7 Dec. (Mrs. DP) is the third record for the state. White-crowned Sparrows were widespread in southwestern Baldwin County (VDH) and 11 were counted at Gulf Shores on 19 Jan. (ERT, LPA). One was at Clayton on 3 & 5 March (Dr RB). At least 100 Fox Sparrows were present on one weedy 20 acre field in Birmingham; 53 were banded 23 Nov. to 14 March—on the last date 50% of the birds caught were already banded (TAI & JMI). A Smith's Longspur, carefully identified on short grass in Foley on 8 Jan. (PFC) is the first record for the coast and the 6th for the state. It is as far as known, the southeasternmost record of the species!

Deadline for spring observations (March, April, and May) to be in my hands is 10 June. We would like to document the spring advance across Alabama of many common summer birds such as Chimney Swift, Great Crested Flycatcher, Catbird, many warblers, Bobolink, Indigo Bunting, and others just like the Purple Martin above. We look forward to seeing the observer list below look like the A.O.S. membership list.

Observers (contributors in capitals)—Virginia H. Allcott, Lois P. Archer, THOMAS Z. ATKESON, Ben M. Buerger, Birmingham Audubon Society, J. Russell Bailey, Naomi G. Banks, ANDY K. BATES, Dr. Ruth Berrey, MICHAEL L. BIERLY, Clara L. Caffey, George W. Carleton, Jack N. Carusos, P. FAIRLY CHANDLER, Ernest Corley, Jerome B. Couch, Walter F. Coxe, Rev. J. L. Dom, S. J., Julian Dusi, Rosemary Dusi, MARY A. GAILLARD, M. Wilson Gaillard, Robert Greer, Mrs. W. E. Grooms, William J. Hamrick, Marion L. Hanahan, Sybil R. Hanks, R.W. (Buddy) Havard, Gaynell Hayward, R.E. (Tuck) Hayward, Dan C. Holliman, VERDA DHORNE, John M. Imhof, Thomas A. Imhof, Harry Johnstone, Katherine Johnstone, James E. Keeler, Helen H. Kittinger, Robert W. Loftin, Eddie B. May, Margaret E. Miller, Earl M. McGowin, Louise McKinstry, Sam Pate, Mrs. Dewitt Prince, Elberta G. Reid, Robert R. Reid, Jr., Margaret L. Robinson, James W. Shepherd, Mrs. Allan Shephard, Mary Alice Skelton, ROBERT W. SKINNER, Genevieve Spafford, Jim Spafford, E. R. (Lib) Toenes, L. A. WELLS, Harriett H. Wright, Josephine Wood.

1036 Pike Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35204