

## THE SEASON FALL 1969

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The weather in general in Alabama continues cooler and drier than average, although wetter periods are frequent. Increased use of water has also markedly affected water levels such as around Birmingham where Lake Purdy had record low water levels and low, but not record low, rainfall. Consequently deep water birds such as Loons and Horned Grebe were locally scarce.

Mobile observers report that fall migration between 24 Aug. (Camille) and 15 Oct. was relatively uneventful, possibly because it consists of the trickling through of a great many quiet birds with few or no concentrations. Perhaps an illustration is that of 24 Sep. when 27 species were banded on Dauphin Island with only 49 individuals (MEM). On 15 Oct., 19 species banded included 93 individuals; 70 of them represented but 6 species: Magnolia Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, White-eyed Vireo, Yellowthroat, Indigo Bunting, and Philadelphia Vireo (MEM). The morning of 15 Oct. revealed that over 500 migrants were killed on the northern slopes of Oak Mt., Shelby Co. (See the Keeler account this issue). This was closely followed by another cold front on 18 Oct. which brought kinglets, many warblers, and sparrows and was powerful enough to push a hurricane away from the northern Gulf coast.

Fall migration on the Alabama Gulf coast probably includes all points of the compass. A good part of the time the westerly winds apparently favor an influx of such species as White Pelican, Avocet, White-winged Dove, Western Kingbird, Vermilion Flycatcher, Black-headed Grosbeak, and many others. (See notes on these below.) Often however because of the difference in cooling and heating rates of land and water, "lows" develop in mid-Gulf and their counterclockwise circulation of air produces strong easterly winds on the northern coast. This type of weather favors the appearance of birds that normally migrate down the Atlantic coast, such as Golden Plover, Cape May, Black-throated Blue and Black-poll Warblers, and Bobolink. When this wind shifts it is sometimes possible to see birds in both categories. For instance, after a week of solid overcast and strong easterly winds from Hurricane Laurie on Dauphin Island, both Black-headed Grosbeak and Black-throated Blue Warblers were seen on 25 Oct., and next day with clearing weather and a wind shift to

northerly, a Blackpoll Warbler and 6 Western Kingbirds appeared there.

Birmingham's 5th annual fall count on 27 Sep. with a record 44 observers and 120 party-hours, produced an average 113 species and 9730 individuals or 81 birds per party-hour. Without the impressive blackbird concentrations of our agricultural areas, the waterfowl concentrations such as at Wheeler Refuge, or the seabird concentrations on the coast, Birmingham nevertheless relies on extensive woodlands for an excellent variety of forest species; thus this count produced 24 species of warblers and the usual 8 species of woodpeckers.

Loons, Grebe—The Com. Loon was reported more common this fall in three places; Wheeler Refuge (TZA), Chattahoochee Valley (LAW), and Gulf Coast (MAG). On 24 Nov., 3 Red-throated Loons flew onto Lake Oliver (near Phenix City). They dove, caught fish, stayed close together, and remained 25 minutes presenting excellent views of all parts. One bird still showed signs of summer plumage on the neck and nape. Several behavioral details distinctly different from the Com. Loon were noted (LAW). This is the 6th inland record for Alabama. At Florala on 21 Nov. 3 Horned Grebes (HMS) are the earliest for the Lower Coastal Plain.

Pelicanlike birds—A fairly early peak of 300 White Pelicans were in Mobile on 14 Oct. (LRT). Small numbers of Brown Pelicans were noted all fall on our Gulf coast (MAG, TAI) and 25 were noted on Petit Bois Is. on 11 Nov. (WTS). On our barrier-island coast, east points are eroding away and west points are building up. Hurricane Camille accelerated this action so that almost the entire eastern half of Sand Island has washed away and Dauphin Island, its east point protected by rock jetties, is about 300 yards longer on the west end. No part of Petit Bois Island now remains in Alabama. At Lake Oliver on 31 Oct. the Double-crested Cormorant, virtually unrecorded in inland Alabama for 15 years, was noted for the third straight season (LAW).

Hérons—On Dog River, Mobile, a Green Heron was still present on 27 Nov. (LMcK) where one had wintered last year. In Covington County at Wing, 8 Cattle Egrets still present on 15 Nov. (CLK) are the latest for the Lower Coastal Plain. A Com. Egret on 1 Nov at Lake Purdy (B'ham) (AM, KTK, HHK) is the latest for the Mountain Region, the only region where the species does

not winter.

Waterfowl—Present at Wheeler Refuge as of 1 Dec were 21,000 Canada Geese (down 22% from same time last year), 1000 Blue Geese (same), 60 Snows (same), and 20,000 ducks (down 33%). The Geese contain a healthy portion of young of the year, and the ducks had fewer Mallards (TZA). A second Alabama Brant was seen on 3 Nov, also at Wheeler Refuge (BT, WP & HDP). Exotic waterfowl are appearing more often recently. For instance, a male Garganey consorted with a wild flock of Blue-winged Teal at Gulf Shores on 11 & 19 March, 1968 (HLJ, PFC). This season, 2 beautiful Egyptian Geese were shot and photographed near Scottsboro on 2 Nov (OMcC fide WAR). Probably all these exotic waterfowl are escapes, but they do have an impact on local birdlife, make local birding more interesting, and are worthy of note, at least in this journal. The Fulvous Tree Duck may or may not be in this category; its most recent record is that of one on Cat Island, near Dauphin on 24 Oct (DCH).

Thirteen Mottled Ducks near Mobile on 29 Sept (REH & SGW) is the highest number ever. Six Green-winged Teal at Lake Oliver on 30 Sep (LAW) is, except for the Tennessee Valley, the earliest for the state. A good flight of Blue-winged Teal resulted in high (but not highest) counts of 60 at Lake Oliver on 4 Oct (LAW) and 405 on the Birmingham Fall Count on 27 Sep (B.A.S.) Nine Shovelers at Wheeler Refuge on 12 Sep (HDP) are, except for 1936-37 when it bred locally, the earliest for the state. The Redhead was early at Lake Oliver, 13 on 23 Oct (LAW). The Com. Goldeneye also came through early; 10 on Dauphin on 14 Nov (REH & SGW); 3 at Florala on 21 Nov, earliest for Lower Coastal Plain (HMS); and 1 at Gulf Shores on 29 Nov (CLK and others). Female or immature White-winged Scoters were noted at 3 places inland; on 29 Oct at Wheeler Refuge (JLW); same day at L. Oliver (LAW); and 16 Nov at Lake Purdy (JRB and others). A male Com Merganser near Decatur on 29 Oct (JLW) is by 3 days the earliest ever for the state. Early Red-breasted Mergansers were at L. Oliver on 24 Oct (LAW), the earliest inland record ever for the state; and Florala on 21 Nov (HMS).

Hawks—A Harlan's Hawk on 27 Nov at Bon Secour (PFC) ties the earliest of 6 state records (one specimen) and is our southernmost record. The 5th Swainson's Hawk for Alabama was seen at Atmore on 19 Nov (RWS). A Rough-

legged Hawk on 20 Nov at Greeneville, Butler Co., (RWS) makes it 8 years out of the last 10 for this somewhat erratic species. A Bald Eagle was out over the Gulf southwest of Sand Island on 27 Sep (FEB). Away from the immediate coast, 3 migrant Peregrine Falcons were noted this fall: Inland Lake, Jefferson Co. on 11 Oct (B.A.S.); Talladega Forest near Heflin on 25 Oct (B.A.S.); and at Magnolia Springs on 21 Nov (PFC).

Rails—Paradise Lake provides one of the very few places near Birmingham with adequate rail habitat; this fall 2 Com Gallinules were there on 27 Sep (JNC, HHK) and 1-3 Virginia Rails from 30 Oct through Dec (HHK, KTK, and others).

Shorebirds—A Golden Plover in Birmingham on 20 Sep (B.A.S.) is the 5th fall record for the Mountain Region. Ten Upland Plovers at Wheeler Refuge on 2 Oct (EC & RMB) are the latest for the Tennessee Valley. A Pectoral Sandpiper at Eufaula Refuge on 8 Nov (LAW) is locally late. Two early Dunlins were in Birmingham on 18 Oct (KTK & HHK). A flock of 10 late Short-billed Dowitchers were at Eufaula Refuge on 8 Nov (LAW). One of the few definite inland records of the Long-billed Dowitcher is that of 3 at Lake Purdy (Birmingham) on 25 Oct (KTK, JRB & RRR). Avocets made news at both ends of the state. At Wheeler Refuge 2 were present 2 to 19 Oct (ENW, HHG, RMB) and 4 were seen on 3 Nov (WP, HDP, BT). Near Mobile Causeway the usual locally-wintering flock built up to its highest numbers ever—25 on 9 Sep (PFC); 43 on 16 Nov (LRT); 50 on 26 Nov (PFC); 60 on 29 Nov (LRT); and 60 on 1 Dec (LRT).

Gulls, Terns—Fewer than usual Ring-billed Gulls passed down the Chattahoochee Valley this year, peak of only 20 on 12 Nov at Lake Oliver (LAW). A Bonaparte's Gull there on 23 Oct (LAW) is the earliest ever inland record for Alabama. Two Forster's Terns were at L. Purdy on 20 Sep (RRR, JRB, and others), and in the Chattahoochee Valley the species was reported in low numbers (LAW). The 7-foot lowering of the Lake Oliver water level is probably largely responsible for the local scarcity of Ring-billed Gull and Forster's Tern. (See Black Tern below.) The relative abundance of a migrant is often difficult to determine from one observation point because local attractiveness may completely nullify any large-area variations in population. Three Common Terns were noted at Smith Lake on 13 Sep (WFC, REB, and others). Black Terns reached a locally highest number of 24 on 8 Aug at L. Oliver (LAW).

Doves—Game personnel (TZA, JEK) report the Mourning Dove in about normal numbers, but in and around Birmingham the species continues to increase by taking advantage of feeders, weedy fields, and other food sources. That these "urbanized" birds furnish hunter opportunities is evidenced by at least 2 birds banded at Birmingham feeders (TAI) and recovered by hunters in southern Jefferson and southern Shelby Counties. The White-winged Dove continues annually fairly common on the coast, though still noteworthy (MWG, WMC, and others). One in Mobile on the 8th (REH & SGW) is our first September record, and one was in Baldwin County on 30 Nov (PFC).

Flycatchers—Six Western Kingbirds on Dauphin on 26 Oct (TAI & JMI) are the most seen this fall. On 20 Oct at Magnolia Springs the first TROPICAL KINGBIRD in Alabama was recorded (PFC). The bird was studied at leisure on a barbed-wire fence at 50 feet both morning and evening, and a satisfactory description, which emphasized the brown forked tail with no black or white, was furnished. A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, seen and heard in Birmingham on 6 Oct (HHW) ties the latest inland record, and a Least Flycatcher banded there on 18 Oct (TAI & JMI) is the latest inland record. (Unidentified Empidonaxes have been recorded in Birmingham through 26 Oct.) An Olive-sided Flycatcher was on Dauphin on 24 Sep (LMcK & LRT). In Baldwin County near Foley a Vermilion Flycatcher was seen on 17 Nov (LPA & LRT).

Blue Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch—The heavy Blue Jay flight this fall was documented by the 1150 birds recorded on the Birmingham Fall Count on 27 Sep (B.A.S.), highest number ever anywhere in Alabama. Its penetration was shown by the big ones banded on Dauphin on 25 Oct—5 of 8 jays had wings longer than 128 mm., the longest breeding season wing from Birmingham (TAI & JMI). The Red-breasted Nuthatch appeared in good numbers again with a bird on Dauphin on 27 Sep (REH & SGW) the earliest ever for the Coastal Plain, and later birds on the island even feeding in live oaks (TAI).

Thrushes—A Gray-cheeked Thrush that hit a picture window near Decatur on 9 Sep (PR) is the earliest ever for the Tennessee Valley and is now a specimen in the Wheeler Refuge collection. The brown thrushes were relatively scarce as migrants near Birmingham, although common enough on the coast. For instance, in September and October in Birmingham with 68 Catbirds banded, the only thrushes banded were 1 Wood, 1 Hermit, and 1 Gray-cheek, perhaps only

the last a true migrant (TAI & JMI). On the coast with 20 Catbirds banded in September and October on Dauphin, thrushes banded were 7 Wood, 7 Swainson's, 5 Hermit, and 1 Veery (MEM, TAI). The 38 Eastern Bluebirds recorded on 27 Sep (B.A.S.) is the lowest of 15 cooperative counts (Spring, Fall, and Christmas) in the last 5 years around Birmingham.

Kinglets, Vireos—A heavy flight of Golden-crowned Kinglets this fall was not reflected in higher winter figures around Birmingham, so evidently the bulk of the birds passed farther south. In Birmingham the first birds were noted on 18 Oct by 5 observers in 5 different places (fide RJK) and birds were then common and widespread for about a month. In Mobile the first birds were seen on 19 Oct (MAG and many) which ties the earliest ever date (1957, 1967, & 1968) and the birds then became common. In Baldwin County the species arrived with the White-throated and Swamp Sparrows and remained common (PFC). The Ruby-crowned Kinglet was more common than usual, and 2 in Birmingham on 27 Sep (REB & MIB) tied the earliest ever record for the Mountain Region. The 7th Bell's Vireo for Alabama is our 4th fall bird, one banded on Dauphin on 15 Oct (MEM). Two Warbling Vireos, also on Dauphin on 15 Oct (MAG, LMcK, LRT) are the latest ever for the state by 2 weeks.

Warblers—A Swainson's Warbler (Waterthrush?) was banded in Birmingham on 20 Sep and seen on 22 Sep (same place, brand new band seen—TAI & JMI); latest record north of the Coastal Plain, but one was banded on Dauphin on 24 Sep (MEM) where the species stays a month later. The first Magnolia Warbler this fall was one banded in Birmingham on 30 Aug, 1 day shy of the earliest ever (RJK). Four coastal Black-throated Blue Warblers, the first one earliest ever for Alabama by 4 days, are all probably caused by strong easterly winds; 12 Sep, Mobile (MAG); 21 Oct, Mobile (LMcK); 25 Oct, Dauphin, an immature male banded (TAI & JMI); 27 Oct, Mobile (LA). The first fall Myrtle Warblers were 3 widely-scattered ones in Birmingham on 27 Sep (IRB, REB, WFC), and in Mobile one on 10 Oct (MAG). A Black-throated Green Warbler on Dauphin on 11 Nov (REH & SGW) is, except for about a dozen winter records, the latest for the state. A Cerulean Warbler on Dauphin on 22 Oct (CLC, LMcK) is the latest for Alabama by 20 days. The first fall Blackpoll Warblers ever recorded anywhere in the Coastal Plain were seen following a week of strong easterly winds and solid overcast; one on Dauphin on 26 Oct (TAI & JMI) and one in Mobile on 27 Oct (LA). Tying the previous late date

for the state was a male Prairie Warbler on Dauphin on 26 Oct (TAI); but even later were records on 17 Oct, 2 & 23 Nov, all at the same place in Birmingham and possibly the same bird (HHK). Prior to this year, the Connecticut Warbler has been recorded in fall only once in the Tennessee Valley, once in the Mountain Region, and three times on the Coast. This year, the species was detected three times around Birmingham: on 27 Sep in Mountain Brook (IFS); on 15 Oct on Oak Mt., Shelby Co., (JEK) first specimen (Dept. Cons. Coll.) for Alabama (See Keeler account.); and 17 Oct in Hoover (HHK), latest ever for the state. The Mourning Warbler was recorded again on Dauphin Is. this fall, 24 Sep (LMcK, LRT); 25 Sep, 1 banded (REH, SGW); and 25 Oct (JLD and many), latest ever for the state by 17 days. A Hooded Warbler, picked up dead on Oak Mt. on 15 Oct, one of a very, very few banded migration casualties, had been marked at Ashtabula (extreme northeastern) Ohio on 18 Sep, 1968 (fide JEK).

Bobolink, Summer Tanager—A Bobolink specimen (Dept. Cons. Coll.) from Oak Mt. on 15 Oct (JEK) is the latest ever inland record by a week; and a bird seen well near Foley on 16 Nov (LPA & LRT) is later by almost a month than any other state record. A Summer Tanager in Birmingham on 3 Nov (HBT) is the latest ever inland.

Finches—A Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Birmingham on 31 Oct (TAI) is, except for birds which lingered in 1936 and 1957, the latest for the Mountain Region. Three Black-headed Grosbeaks were seen on Dauphin Is. this fall; 15 Oct (LMcK & MAG); 17 Oct (CLC & JCB); and 25 Oct (JLD & MAG). Dickcissels again lingered in the vicinity of Fairhope; 1 on 16 Nov, 2 on 20 Nov and 3 on 1 Dec (LPA & LRT). The "echo" flight of Evening Grosbeaks this winter was started by our earliest ever date for the state, 2 Nov in Birmingham (OP). In Birmingham Purple Finches were first noted on 5 Nov (HHW) and Pine Siskins on 8 Nov (JRB, HHK, KTK), the latter giving promise of an outstanding flight. On 6 Nov on Dauphin a record 6 Lark Sparrows were counted (LRT). Two Slate-colored Juncos in Birmingham on 27 Sep (RDB) are by one day the earliest ever for the state. The 6th coastal record for the Clay-colored Sparrow was one banded on Dauphin on 27 Sep (REH); and the second inland record was in Birmingham, less than ¼ mile from the first one, on 15 Oct (TAI). The White-crowned Sparrow arrived slightly late, but was common around Birmingham and on the coast. In southern Baldwin County, 24 were counted

on 21 Nov (JLD & LRT); in Birmingham 6 were banded 18 Oct to 13 Nov (TAI & JMI). One repeating bird gained 4.3 gms (20% of total weight) in 10 days. White-throats were a little bit late, first noted in Birmingham on 12 Oct (TAI) and in Mobile on 11 Oct (JH). The first Lincoln's Sparrows were noted this fall in Birmingham on 10 Oct, one banded (JMI & TAI). Four Swamp Sparrows were seen in two places around Birmingham on 27 Sep (WFC & RDB); only one state fall record is earlier.

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