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1973 CHRISTMAS COUNTS FEATURE NORTHERN
VISITORS AND LINGERING SUMMER RESIDENTS

Undoubtedly the most outstanding event recorded on the 13 Christmas Counts reported to Alabama Birdlife for the 1973 Christmas season (which included two counts at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge--one on Dec. 22 and the other on Jan. 6) was the invasion of Red Crossbills. This nomadic finch was reported by three field parties at Birmingham for a state record in abundance of 55, and a group of 6 was sighted at Jacksonville. The Red Crossbill is not new to Alabama (see Imhof, Thomas A., Alabama Birds (1962): 540-41); but there have not been many observations until recently (see Imhof, "The Season, Fall 1972 and Spring 1973," Alabama Birdlife, Vol. 20, p. 16, Vol. 21, p. 14). However, during the winter of 1973-74, the bird appeared in relative abundance in the Mountain Region. Illustrative of its nomadic nature is that banding indicates the influx may have been of two races--the race minor, which is the eastern subspecies inhabiting places as far south as the Great Smokies (and the one that might normally be expected here when the bird does invade Alabama), and the race sitkensis, which is smaller and duller in coloration, breeds in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia, and on rare intervals occurs in the East (see Peterson, Roger Tory, A Field Guide to the Birds (1934): 210; and also the article by Helen B. Thigpen, "The Season, Winter 1973-74" and "The Bander's Corner" in this issue).

The single Black Scoters at Gulf Shores and Bay County were another northern species that is reasonably rare in our area in the winter. Other notable northern visitors were the Short-eared Owl at Dauphin Island (the fourth winter and latest Ala. Gulf Coast record for the species) and the Rough-legged Hawk at Marion.

The Gulf Shores count, held on Dec. 31, featured Fairly Chandler's New Year's Eve party, expertly hosted by our distaff counters from Pensacola and Birmingham, and a noteworthy southern visitor, the third Ala. winter record for a Magnificent Frigate-bird.

From the West, observers at Marianna were treated with a male Vermilion Flycatcher--a rare western visitor in winter that has not been seen too often recently on the coast and, when appearing, has usually been a female or immature rather than the male with his brilliant red plumage. Other western visitors included the White-winged Doves (3) at Mobile and Lincoln's Sparrows (primarily a western species) at Dauphin Island (3) and Gulf Shores (2).

Doubtless the mild winter contributed to many summer residents remaining on the coast. Most significant in this category were the Indigo Bunting seen at Bellingrath Gardens on the Dauphin Island count (a male in mottled plumage), a male Summer Tanager within the count week at Marianna, a male Hooded Warbler at Bay County and two Yellow-breasted Chats at Ft. Morgan. Other summer residents that are rare to uncommon on the coast in winter included Black-and-White Warblers at Gulf Shores and within the count week at Mobile, the record number of 12 Yellow-throated Warblers at Bay County with others reported on or within the count week of the Mobile, Gulf Shores and Marianna counts, and White-eyed Vireos on six counts, including a high of 5 at Gulf Shores (an Ala. Gulf Coast winter record) and 1 inland at Eufaula Refuge on its Dec. 22 count. Also of interest was a hummingbird that may have been a lingering summer Ruby-throat or a visiting western Rufous within the count week at Bay County.

Baltimore Orioles have recently been appearing in greater numbers on Christmas Counts in the Southeast, and this year they were reported on two counts

in the AOS area--2 on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count and 1 at Pensacola where also was seen 1 Bullock's Oriole, a winter visitor from the West and the third known observation for NW Fla. Thus, at Pensacola, both of the birds now considered by the AOU as races of the Northern Oriole were recorded.

Perhaps the mild winter might also have accounted for the large number of counts on which certain of the wading birds appeared. The White Ibis was reported on five counts, with a high of 9 at Pensacola and one inland on the Jan. 6 Eufaula Refuge count. Single Green Herons were reported on four counts, including one inland at Birmingham (its second winter record), and the Cattle Egret on five with a high of 26 on Dauphin Island. A Little Blue Heron was also found inland on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count, and single Least Bitterns appeared at Gulf Shores and within the count week at Bay County. The American Bittern, a more northerly wader, was reported on six counts, with a high of 4 at Bay County and inland both on the Eufaula Refuge counts (3 on Dec. 22 and 2 on Jan. 6) and at Jacksonville (1). Bay County also reported 38 Am. (or now called Great) Egrets for a NW Fla. Christmas Count record and 10 Black-crowned Night Herons (while 9 of the latter were seen inland on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count). The Yellow-crowned Night Heron might be expected to be rarer in winter since it is the more southern of the two night herons, but 7 were reported at Pensacola for its fourth consecutive Christmas Count record and 2 at Bay County. Notable also in the wading bird category were the Reddish Egrets--2 at Dauphin Island and 1 at Ft. Morgan.

In the category of species endangered from persistent pesticide residues, 42 Brown Pelicans were noted at Bay County for a recent NW Fla. record; however, the 20 at Dauphin Island was a decline from its 1972 Christmas Count. In this same category, immature Bald Eagles were noted within the count weeks at Wheeler and Eufaula Refuges (as well as one on the Jan. 6 count at the latter), an Osprey on the Bay County count, a Peregrine Falcon at Gulf Shores, and single Merlins (or Pigeon Hawks) on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count and within the count week at Bay County. The Am. Kestrel was generally down in numbers throughout the area although reported on all 13 counts.

Other coastal notables were an immature Broad-winged Hawk at Pensacola, a Limpkin at Marianna (perhaps wandering westward from Wakulla Springs although Marianna has good cypress swamp habitat in the Chipola River area), a Chuck-will's-widow at Mobile and a Whip-poor-will at Pensacola. Bellingrath Gardens was productive for the Dauphin Island count since it, in addition, yielded a White-breasted Nuthatch, a rarity on the Gulf Coast. In the sparrow and related seed-eaters category, Pensacola reported a Dickcissel, Gulf Shores had 3 Grasshopper Sparrows (which were also reported on both counts at Eufaula Refuge), Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island had single LeComte's Sparrows, and there was a Henslow's within the count week at Gulf Shores. Rounding out the list of significant coastal observations were Anhingas (which are rarely noted on our Christmas Counts) at Marianna (2) and within the count week at Bay County, a Rough-winged Swallow at Bay County, and a phalarope within the count week there, doubtless either a Northern or Red, which observers will attest are difficult to distinguish in winter plumage. The Sandhill Crane flock was again at Gulf Shores with a count of 23, and 13 Am. Avocets were recorded on the Mobile count for their tenth out of its last eleven Christmas Counts. Species that normally do not winter as far south as the coast, being rare or uncommon there, included a Bewick's Wren at Gulf Shores, White-crowned Sparrows at Gulf Shores (10) and Pensacola (1), and a Fox Sparrow within the count week at the latter.

Noteworthy inland observations included the Whistling Swan within the count week at Wheeler Refuge for three of its last four Christmas Count periods,

Oldsquaws within the count weeks at both Wheeler and Birmingham, Dunlin on both Eufaula Refuge counts (6 on Dec. 22 and 2 on Jan. 6), 7 Short-billed Dowitchers on the Dec. 22 count there, 4 Tree Swallows at Marion, a House Wren at Wheeler Refuge (it not usually being found that far north in winter), and 2 Palm Warblers there (where until last year the bird had not been recorded recently during the winter season). Brewer's Blackbirds were reported from Wheeler (3--where they are uncommon and local in winter), from Birmingham (25--where they are even rarer, this being the second Christmas Count record), and from Marion (505--where the prairie pasture habitat is more like their western homes).

Waterfowl were down in number, especially on the coast. This appears to be due partly to a general decline in numbers and partly to so-called "short-stopping" by feeding programs in more northern areas. Exceptions were recent records for Lesser Scaup at Bay County (2325) and Red-breasted Mergansers at Pensacola (828). The white phase of the Snow Goose also seems to have done reasonably well with a Tenn. Valley record of 233 at Wheeler Refuge and good numbers of 16 at Bay County, 12 at Gulf Shores, 11 at Ft. Morgan and 8 on the Jan. 6 Eufaula Refuge count. Bay County also recorded a high Christmas Count number of 36 Wood Ducks, our only generally resident duck.

In the category of birds of the marsh and shore, some terns that normally winter farther south still appeared, as they often do, in the AOS area. These included a Gull-billed Tern within the count week at Bay County and Sandwich Terns at Dauphin Island (3), Gulf Shores (1) and within the count week at Bay County. Recorded in high numbers at Dauphin Island were the Royal Tern (439) and Black Skimmer (348) for second highest Gulf Coast winter records. Piping and Snowy Plovers are, because of diminishing beach habitat, included on the "Blue-List" of species not yet endangered but whose numbers are reported on the decline (American Birds (1973), 27(6):943). On the 1973 AOS counts, Pippings were found on or within the count week of five counts, but with a high of only 5 at Dauphin Island, and Snowys on three with a high of 7 at Gulf Shores. Only one Am. Oystercatcher (also on the "Blue-List") was found, it being at Dauphin Island. However, abundance records were set for the Great Blue Heron at Wheeler Refuge (94 for a Tenn. Valley winter record), Bonaparte's Gull on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count (223 for an inland record), Ring-billed Gull also on that count (191 for an inland record outside the Tenn. Valley), Killdeer at Gulf Shores (772 for a second high for the AOS area), and Black-bellied Plover at Bay County (88, the most in almost a decade on an AOS Christmas Count). Bay County also had high numbers of gulls--1051 Herring (a Gulf Coast count record), 921 Ring-bills and 957 Laughings. Spotted Sandpipers had a good year, being recorded on eight counts, including inland observations of single birds at Wheeler Refuge and Birmingham and a high count of 12 at Pensacola. The Virginia Rail seems also to have done well on the Christmas Counts with 9 at Gulf Shores, 8 at Bay County and 2 inland on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count.

Other non-passerine abundance figures were: Common Loon--364 at Pensacola for a NW Fla. record; Horned Grebe--509 at Gulf Shores for the highest recent Gulf Coast record; Double-crested Cormorant--1210 at Ft. Morgan for the second highest Gulf Coast record; Black Vulture--171 at Marion for the second highest AOS area record, 91 at Marianna for a Gulf Coast record, 56 at Dauphin Island, setting a Christmas Count record for the Ala. Gulf Coast, and 37 at Jacksonville for a Mt. Region record; Marsh Hawk--the sizable number of 29 on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count; Com. Ground Dove--the high number of 36 at Bay County; Belted Kingfisher--58 there for an AOS area record; and Yellow-shafted (Com.) Flicker--246 at Birmingham, also for an AOS area record. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers did well this winter with an inland record being set at Marion (50) and regional records at Birmingham (46) and Wheeler Refuge (35); and, as all observers have noted, the Mourning Dove is becoming more numerous in urban areas as evidenced by the almost 1400 recorded at Birmingham. In addition, for the second straight year, energetic nighttime

observing resulted in high counts of Screech Owls at Birmingham (25) and Gulf Shores (15).

The first Christmas Count at Marion in over a decade set an AOS area record in abundance for the Water Pipit (597) and Coastal Plain records for Cedar Waxwing (1475), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (183), Hermit Thrush (26), and Winter Wren (16). Other passerine abundance figures included: Eastern Phoebe--38 on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count for an AOS area winter record; Tree Swallow--the large number of over 1100 at Mobile; Blue Jay--735 at Birmingham for an AOS area Christmas Count record; Crows--4373 Fish and 1265 Common at Marianna for AOS area and Gulf Coast records, respectively; House Wren--38 at Ft. Morgan for an AOS area winter record; Carolina Wren (said to inhabit practically every brushy area in the Southeast)--300 at Birmingham for an AOS area record with 108 at Marion and 95 at Gulf Shores for Upper Coastal Plain and Gulf Coast records, respectively; Long-billed Marsh Wren--39 on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count for an inland record; Com. Mockingbird--352 at Birmingham for an AOS area Christmas Count record; Brown Thrasher--112 also at Birmingham for the same; Myrtle Warbler--over 1900 at Gulf Shores; Rusty Blackbird (which observers reported to have been present this winter in larger numbers than usual)--259 at Marianna for a Gulf Coast record; Com. Grackle--a relatively large roost for the Gulf Coast estimated at over 7500, also at Marianna and being a record for that area; Cardinal--694 at Birmingham for an AOS area record at that time, with 460 at Wheeler Refuge and 366 at Marion for Tenn. Valley and Coastal Plain records, respectively; Savannah Sparrow--548 on the Jan. 6 Eufaula Refuge count for an AOS area record; Slate-colored Junco (now considered by the AOU as a race of the virtually all-inclusive "Dark-eyed Junco")--2157 at Birmingham, also an AOS area record, with 414 at Marion (highest for the Coastal Plain); White-throated Sparrow--1621 at Birmingham for an inland record; and Swamp Sparrow--426 on the Dec. 22 Eufaula Refuge count for the same.

This was the "echo" year for the Evening Grosbeak following the winter invasion of 1972-73. However, this species was reported on only two counts--20 in Birmingham and 6 in Jacksonville, relatively small numbers when compared with the previous year. On the other hand, it was noted within the count week as far south as Pensacola and Marianna, thus making observations on or within the count week of 4 of the 13 counts as compared with 5 of 11 the previous Christmas season. Although another species from the northern forests, the Red-breasted Nuthatch, was virtually absent during the winter of 1973-74, the Pine Siskin did well with the 234 at Birmingham setting an AOS area record.

On the 1973 counts, a record total of 196 species were recorded and 5 additional ones during the weeks of the counts (the full count period being Dec. 15 through Jan. 1). Complete tabulations of all species on counts conducted during that period will appear in Vol. 28, No. 2 of American Birds (now incorporating Audubon Field Notes), which will be received by all participants in those counts. Therefore, in order to avoid duplication, a complete tabulation of only counts not held during that period will be set forth following this article. A summary of the above 13 Christmas Counts conducted in the AOS area is as follows:

CORRECTION--In last issue's article on the Breeding Bird Survey, Alabama Birdlife, 21:8-10, two species were omitted. The Pine Warbler, 4.14 average birds per route and Prairie Warbler, 4.11 birds per route should appear in paragraph A immediately following the Chipping Sparrow. This means then that 63 species were recorded one or more birds per route and that the total species recorded on the seven years of the Breeding Bird Survey in Alabama is 160.

--T. A. Imhof

Count and Compiler	Species (a)		Total Individuals	Participants	Parties	Party-Hours
	On Count	Within Count Week				
Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (John A. Dougherty)	96	100	101,197	34	6	61
Birmingham (Thomas A. Imhof)	90	94	44,704	54	13	122
Jacksonville (C. William Summerour)	61	62	5,865	10	2	13
Marion (James V. Peavy, Jr.)	92	92	50,272	14	4	48
Eufaula Wildlife Refuge (Dec. 22) (Mike Fuller)	110	113	13,817	17(b)	8	94
Eufaula Wildlife Refuge (Jan. 6) (Julian L. Dusi)	92	94	3,584	14	--	17
Mobile (Richard E. Hayward, Jr.)	134	135	18,498	11	7	45
Dauphin Island (M. Wilson Gaillard)	127	127	9,002	18	8	53
Ft. Morgan (P. Fairly Chandler)	97	97	7,657	6	4	27.5
Gulf Shores (P. Fairly Chandler)	128	135	36,874	21	8	76
Pensacola (Curtis L. Kingsbery)	115	120	15,801	35(b)	9	83
Marianna (Marion W. Gray)	82	88	18,719	11(b)	5	32
Bay County (Panama City) (Donald P. Scott)	130	140	13,936	25(b)	10	88

(a) Species combined in the 1973 revision of the AOU checklist are treated separately in this article because reported separately on Christmas Counts.

(b) Additional observers at feeders.

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Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge (incl Chattahoochee R., sloughs managed for waterfowl, and Cowhee and Wylance Creeks--count limited to refuge area): Jan. 6: 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Overcast except cleared during noon hours; temp. moderate; wind light and variable; 55 party-miles (51 by car, 3 on foot, 1 by boat). Participants: Neva Brunton, Sue Chambliss, Julian L. Dusi (compiler), Rosemary T. Dusi, Ted Ellis, Pat Hagan (ass't refuge manager), Ed Jones, Marjory D. Lyons, Jackie and Ron McKittrick, Harriett and Tom Meadows, and Ann and Lucy Tyrrell.

Pied-billed Grebe-1; Great Blue Heron-75; Great (or Am.) Egret-19; Am. Bittern-2; White Ibis-1; Canada Goose-194; Snow Goose-8; Blue Goose-35; Mallard-382; Black Duck-2; Gadwall-4; No. Pintail-36; Am. Wigeon (or Baldpate)-9; No. Shoveler-50; Wood Duck-13; Ring-necked Duck-353; Canvasback-50; Lesser Scaup-2; Rufflehead-34; Ruddy Duck-6; Hooded Merganser-9; Turkey Vulture-6; Black Vulture-18; Red-tailed Hawk-9; Red-shouldered Hawk-1; Bald Eagle-1; Marsh Hawk-10; Am. Kestrel (or Sparrow Hawk)-6; Bob-white-6; Am. Coot-197; Killdeer-24; Com. Snipe-4; Greater Yellowlegs-5; Lesser Yellowlegs-2; Least Sandpiper-7; Dunlin (or Red-backed Sandpiper)-2; Ring-billed Gull-59; Bonaparte's Gull-1; Mourning Dove-80; Com. Ground Dove-3; Screech Owl-1; Great Horned Owl-2; Barred Owl-3; Belted Kingfisher-7; Yellow-shafted (Com.) Flicker-12; Pileated Woodpecker-5; Red-bellied Woodpecker-9; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker-2; Hairy Woodpecker-6; Downy Woodpecker-5; Red-cockaded Woodpecker-1;

Eastern Phoebe-9; Blue Jay-70; Com. Crow-13; Fish Crow-9; Carolina Chickadee-26; Tufted Titmouse-20; Brown-headed Nuthatch-5; Carolina Wren-21; Long-billed Marsh Wren-5; Short-billed Marsh (or Sedge) Wren-3; Com. Mockingbird-10; Brown Thrasher-3; Am. Robin-52; Hermit Thrush-10; Eastern Bluebird-5; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher-1; Golden-crowned Kinglet-14; Ruby-crowned Kinglet-37; Loggerhead Shrike-10; Com. Starling-59; Myrtle (Yellow-rumped) Warbler-15; Pine Warbler-3; Com. Yellowthroat-3; House Sparrow-3; Eastern Meadowlark-121; Red-winged Blackbird-130; Com. Grackle-46; Cardinal-28; Purple Finch-11; Pine Siskin-4; Am. Goldfinch-24; Rufous-sided Towhee-31; Savannah Sparrow-548; Grasshopper Sparrow-1; Vesper Sparrow-54; Slate-colored (Dark-eyed) Junco-7; Chipping Sparrow-150; Field Sparrow-46; White-throated Sparrow-46; Swamp Sparrow-12; and Song Sparrow-140. Within count week: Green-winged Teal, and Blue-winged Teal.