

**THIRD RECORD FOR THE RUFF
(*PHILOMACHUS PUGNAX*) IN ALABAMA**

Ann Miller



Figure 1. Ruff (second from left) feeding among Pectoral Sandpipers, yellowlegs and a Killdeer. (Photo by Ann Miller)



Figure 2. Ruff in flight (center right) with Pectoral Sandpipers and Starlings. (Photo by Ann Miller)

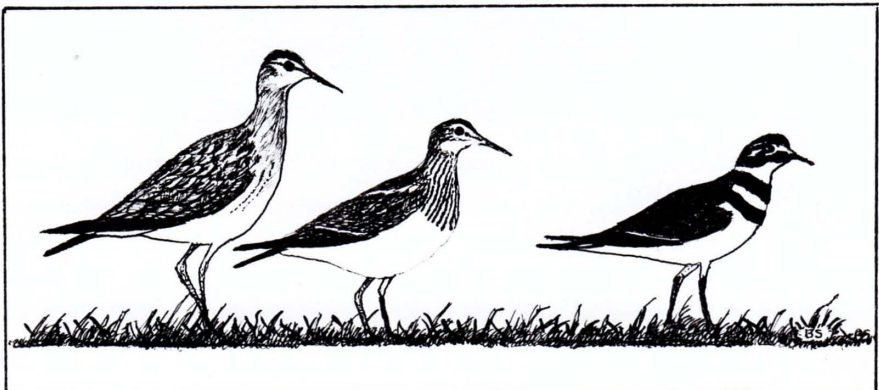
On 2 September 1989, during a routine birding trip to a sod farm about 50 km (30 mi) southeast of Birmingham, Alice Stevens, my companion, and I noticed a different looking bird among a small flock of Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*) that were feeding on the open,

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lawn-like turf (Fig. 1 and 2). Since our highest expectations were to find Buff-breasted Sandpipers (*Tryngites subruficollis*), Lesser Golden-Plovers (*Pluvialis dominica*), or other short-grass shorebirds, one can imagine our elation when we identified the bird as an immature male Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*).

We had excellent lighting for viewing both the Ruff and Pectoral Sandpipers which were about 45 m (135 ft) away. It was immediately obvious that the Ruff was larger by several centimeters than the Pectoral Sandpipers and heavier in appearance. The upper parts were dark brown with buffy, chestnut-fringed feathers, the breast and upper belly strongly washed with buff, and the sides of the breast faintly streaked. The bill was dark except for a pale area at the base, and relatively short, with a slight droop at the tip. The legs and feet were gray, and in flight the oval white patches on the rump and the white underwings were very noticeable. During the breeding season, adult males have spectacular rufous, black, or white ruffs about the neck, and thus the name Ruff. Females lack this conspicuous plumage and are smaller. Leg color varies and may be red, orange, or yellow.

Even though this Old World species is a regular migrant throughout North America and has nested in Alaska, it is considered rare and irregular in Alabama, this sighting being only the third record for the state. Previous sightings were in the fall of 1971 and spring of 1976, both at Eufaula Refuge. The 1989 record is by far the most thoroughly documented due to the fact that approximately 50 people observed it, some from as far away as Tennessee. It is probably safe to say that we can expect more records of this distinctive bird as the number of observers continues to increase. *Ann Miller, 520 Yorkshire Dr., Birmingham, AL 35209.*



**SUMMARY OF BAND RECOVERIES FROM WADING BIRDS
BANDED IN ALABAMA, 1953-1985**

Julian L. Dusi and Rosemary D. Dusi

Birdbanding is one of the major methods of securing dispersal data. The relative ease of banding large numbers of colonial wading bird nestlings provides a large amount of dispersal data. We started banding nestling herons in 1953 and have records through 1985. Most herons have been banded at heron colonies whose status we also have monitored (Dusi and Dusi 1987).

Methods

Banding nestling herons first requires that the bander get to the nest. Wading or using boats in swamps, the use of small extension ladders in the boats to reach the higher nests, and the use of extension ladders in upland colonies were methods used in getting to the nests. Catching the nestling birds usually required the use of a bamboo pole with a wire hook on the end. This permitted hooking the nestling around the neck and bringing it to the bander. After banding, the nestling was perched on the pole and replaced in its nest.

Standard U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands were used on all nestlings. Some experimental marking with colored leg bands also was done. Radio-tagging was used on adults to follow their daily movements.

Band recoveries were reports from the Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, Md., made to banders and to the persons reporting the recoveries. All recoveries were of dead birds. Birds recovered in Central and South American were reported as "shot," while those recovered in the United States were described as birds "found dead," "killed by a dog," but never "shot," which was probably the cause.

Results

The banding reported here, from 1953 to 1985, resulted in a total of 3,706 birds banded and 58 returns, with a return percentage of 1.6 (Table 1).

Following are tabulated results of banding and returns:

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TABLE 1. TOTAL NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS OF EACH SPECIES BANDED, RETURNED, AND PERCENTAGE OF RETURNS, 1953-1985.

Species	Total Banded	Total Returns	Percent Returns
Anhinga	4	1	25
Great Blue Heron	8	1	12.5
Green-backed Heron	6	0	0
Little Blue Heron	2,519	42	1.7
Cattle Egret	821	12	1.5
Reddish Egret	2	0	0
Great Egret	42	1	2.4
Snowy Egret	11	1	9
Black-crowned Night-Heron	18	0	0
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	25	0	0
White Ibis	<u>250</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
	3,706	58	1.6

Discussion

As band returns of Little Blue Herons came in, we could see the pattern of dispersal appearing for those nestlings banded at the Hog Wallow Ponds, Macon Co. (Dusi 1958). The nestlings dispersed in all directions from the colony site and some dispersals, showing southward migration, indicated that the nestlings reached Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Inagua, Venezuela, Cuba, and Honduras. The returns of other Little Blue Heron banders, provided by the Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, Md., showed a similar pattern, except that the Little Blue Herons banded west of central Alabama apparently dispersed west and their migration was around the Gulf of Mexico to Central and South America (Dusi 1967). Later banding of Cattle Egret nestlings showed that all of the Alabama nestlings apparently migrated westward around the Gulf of Mexico to Central America (Dusi and Dusi 1967). The dispersal routes and locations of band recoveries are shown in Fig.1. Color banding of some of the nestlings showed that nestlings seldom returned to the colony site where they were hatched. One Little Blue Heron nestling did return to the colony site of its birth and nested while it was still in the white juvenal plumage (Dusi 1967). Of the 58 returns, 32, or 55%, were

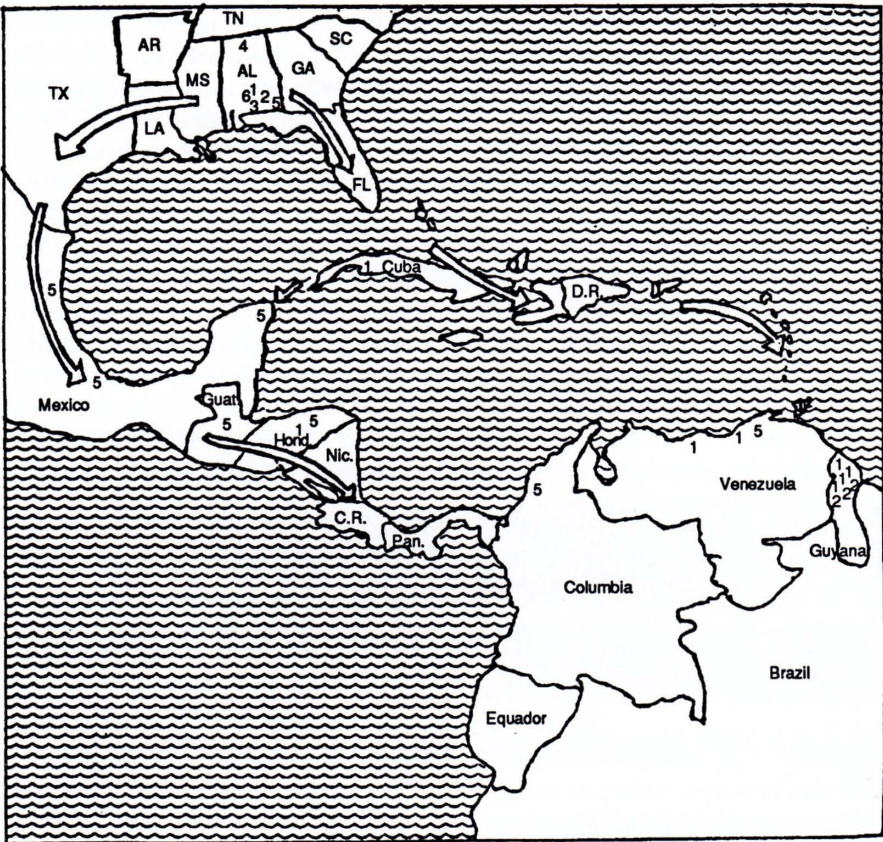


Figure 1. Map of colony locations in Alabama, where herons dispersed out of the United States, and the migration routes used.

Legend of colony numbers

- 1. Hog Wallow ponds, Macon County
- 2. Marvyn, Lee County
- 3. Opp, Covington County
- 4. Swan Creek, Limestone County
- 5. Pansey, Houston County
- 6. Pintlala, Montgomery County

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first year birds, indicating a high mortality rate for the first year.

The radio-telemetry tagging was done by D.L. Bateman (1970) at the Pansey and Malone colony sites. He was able to show that the nesting Little Blue Herons and Cattle Egrets fed within a radius of about 32 km (20 mi) of the colony site. Until the nestlings were about two weeks old, one adult of each pair would stay near the nest for one day, while the other one hunted for food. The next day they would reverse the procedure. When the young were several weeks old, both adults hunted for food. They also made about four trips per day back to the nest to feed the young. Birds that were not nesting roosted around the colony or spent the day out, usually returning to the colony at night. After the major nesting was over, these non-breeding birds usually left the colony area (Bateman 1970, Dusi, et al. 1971).

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