

## 1991 SPRING AND SUMMER SIGHTINGS

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During the spring and summer of 1991 we were blessed with an abundance of birds in our area. Migrants were often plentiful on the coast, and several rarities were discovered, including two new species for Alabama. Temperatures were generally normal for the season; rainfall totals were elevated, particularly in May and June.

Spring migration was punctuated by several moderate fallouts of transients at the coast, particularly in April. The top days for passerines at the coastal "hotspots" were 19 (best), 21, 23, and 27 April. Shorebirding was good at the coast, especially after a wet front 25 April. Passerine migration inland was a little disappointing, but shorebirds passed through in good numbers. The best shorebird day in north Alabama was 6 May, again following a wet frontal system.

This report covers the period from March through July in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle (east to the Apalachicola River). The appearance of observations in this column does not suggest verification or acceptance of records for very rare species, as these must be considered by the appropriate state records committees. It is important that all submissions for birds that are rare, either in general or for a particular season or region, be accompanied by adequate details of the observation. The extent of this documentation depends on the rarity of the species and the difficulty of identification. Reports should always describe the conditions of observation and the diagnostic characters observed. Your help in this matter is appreciated.

County names are in *italics*. "GC" = Gulf Coast (Alabama), "ICP" = Inland Coastal Plain, "MR" = Mountain Region, "TV" = Tennessee Valley. Records not specifying Florida are in Alabama. "ABRC" = Alabama Bird Records Committee, "acc." = accepted, "mob" = many observers, "NWR" = National Wildlife Refuge, "p.a." = pending acceptance, "ph." = photographed, "SP" = State Park, "WMA" = Wildlife Management Area.

**LOONS - RAPTORS:** The **Red-throated Loon** is a rarity in our area, though it is recorded in most years. One was at Dauphin I. 10-21 April (J&JP,mob,acc.ABRC). Common Loons were scarce during the winter in *Bay* and *Gulf*, FL, but in early spring numbers increased considerably (*fide* ACM). The Am. White Pelican sometimes summers in Mobile Bay; on Gaillard I. 15 were seen 29 June (PB,GF,FL). The 125 Double-crested Cormorants in flight s. of Birmingham, *Jefferson*, 28 April (ALM,ADM) set a new MR maximum. Forty adult Cattle Egrets were nesting in July near Leighton, *Colbert*, and a pair of Black-crowned Night-Herons was suspected of breeding at the same site (GNP,WCB,PDK). There are no previous nesting records for these species in n.w. Alabama. A Glossy Ibis, rare in spring, was identified 15 April at Blakely I., *Mobile* (GDJ,GM,PJB).

Three Am. Swallow-tailed Kites were unusual as far north as Wetumpka, *Elmore*, 17 April (IK). The immature Bald Eagles 11 March at Panama City, *Bay*, FL (MB,LS,PC) and 30 March at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin* (GF) were noteworthy. The first successful Alabama nesting of our national bird since 1962 occurred this spring near Camden, *Wilcox*. This nest did not appear to involve hacking-program birds. A Broad-winged Hawk 13 March in *Perry* (ALM,HHF,ASC) established a new early ICP date. Rarely seen, a **Golden Eagle** graced the skies of n. *Jefferson* 6 March (ALM,HHF,BJ,ASC). For many years the Am. Kestrel has been rare in summer in our region. It was encouraging to have four separate reports from late May

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to July in *Morgan* (GDJ,JH) and near Birmingham (TAI). Several Merlins and Peregrine Falcons were seen along the coast this spring, as is usual; the Peregrine 7 May at Ft. Morgan (RAD) was late.

**RAILS - SHOREBIRDS:** The elusive **Black Rail**, rarely encountered but seemingly regular (? resident), was discovered at Dauphin I. 8-12 April (J&JP,mob). Black-bellied Plovers are rare inland in the spring, so four near Muscle Shoals, *Colbert*, 6 May (GDJ,BCG) were noteworthy. Two uncommon summering birds were at Ft. Morgan 22-23 June (GDJ,DGJ). The single Am. Oystercatchers spotted at Ft. Morgan 28 March (PB,GF,FL) and 12 April (JH) were odd for that site. A southward-bound Solitary Sandpiper 13 July at Gulf Shores, *Baldwin* (PB,JL,GF,FL) established a new early GC arrival date. Eighty Willets were downed by a storm on the Mobile Causeway, *Mobile*, 25 April (GDJ,DGJ). The four Upland Sandpipers in s. *Baldwin* 27 April (GDJ,DGJ) were late. Two Long-billed Curlews, regular on the Mobile Causeway, returned to that area as early as 27 July (PB). A Marbled Godwit was unusual at Blakely I. 23 April (GDJ,RAD,WJB,PCT) and nearby on the Mobile Causeway 25 April (GDJ,DGJ). Uncommon in summer, two Ruddy Turnstones were at Ft. Morgan 22-23 June (GDJ,DGJ); both were in alternate (breeding) plumage, which is unusual for summering shorebirds. A molting Western Sandpiper was seasonally rare 22 June at Ft. Morgan (GDJ,DGJ). The 10 White-rumped Sandpipers near Marion, *Perry*, 1 May (GDJ,RRS) were early.

Setting a new early arrival date for Alabama, two alternate-plumaged Baird's Sandpipers were scrutinized 1 April near Marion, *Perry* (GDJ). This species is rare in spring, particularly inland. One was spotted 7 May at Bon Secour, *Baldwin* (JH). Five Pectoral Sandpipers set a new GC early date 13 July at Gulf Shores (PB). Nearby at Bon Secour, 170 Stilt Sandpipers were noteworthy 21 April (GDJ). The five Buff-breasted Sandpipers at a sod farm in s. *Baldwin* 30 March (A&DF,BG) were interesting on that date; up to 13 were present 27 April (GDJ,DGJ). Three early Short-billed Dowitcher were at Swan Creek WMA, *Limestone*, 17 March (SWM). The wet front 25 April produced 530 Long-billed Dowitchers on the Mobile Causeway, *Mobile* (GDJ,DGJ), establishing a new state maximum. This species is difficult to find inland in spring; three were at Decatur, *Morgan*, 6 May (GDJ,BCG). It was a good spring for Wilson's Phalarope in our area; this delicate shorebird is much easier to locate in autumn. Most noteworthy of the records included the first spring ICP record 1 May near Marion, *Perry* (RRS,GDJ), and a new inland maximum of seven birds at Decatur 6 May (GDJ,BCG).

**GULLS - SWALLOWS:** An alternate-plumaged Laughing Gull was a rare inland find 26 May at Waterloo, *Lauderdale* (GNP). An adult **Great Black-backed Gull**, rare but regular in the state, was at Ft. Morgan and Dauphin I. 21 March to 7 April (GF,PB,*et al.*). The 54 Common Terns identified at Ft. Morgan 7 May (JH,RAD) represented a good number for the spring. At least two **Eurasian Collared-Doves** were present at Ft. Morgan 12 April to 7 May (JH,mob,ph.JH,acc.ABRC). The population of this species, presumably originating from birds released in the Bahamas, has exploded in recent years in s. Florida. It has bred for several seasons in our region near Destin, *Okaloosa*, FL, and is now spreading along the Gulf Coast in small numbers. This was the first documented record for Alabama, though it is not officially recognized on the North American list. White-winged Doves are uncommon along the coast in spring; single birds were noted 27 April at Ft. Morgan (LRD,mob) and as late as 22 May in *Okaloosa*, FL (BLM). The species is not expected in summer, so it was a surprise to have one at Ft. Morgan 22 June (GF,PB).

Alabama *finally* recorded the **Buff-bellied Hummingbird**! This species has appeared several times in n.w. Florida and coastal Mississippi, usually in residential areas at feeders. The bird discovered 8 April was at a migrant trap, not a yard; no feeders were present. It is somehow fitting that this Ft. Morgan sighting was by RRS (acc.ABRC)! Good numbers of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds arrived 19 April, with 50+ at Ft. Morgan (BCG,mob), and 60+ at Ft. Pickens, FL (FAP). A wintering female **Calliope Hummingbird**, Alabama's second, continued in *Shelby* to 29 March (*fide* RRS).

Least Flycatchers are reported infrequently in spring; single birds were observed 21 April at Ft. Morgan (JH,JB), and 17 May near Florence, *Lauderdale* (PDK). A pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers appeared 27 April w. of Florence (PDK,DCP,PN,GE), at the site where they nested in 1990. There was no evidence of breeding this year. The second July GC record of this elegant bird came 13 July at Ft. Morgan (PB,JL,GF,FL). Three Tree Swallows were at Copeland Ferry, *Walker*, 15 June (TAI,DW), representing only the third MR June sighting. There were several early swallow reports this spring. A new early TV date for N. Rough-winged Swallow was set 10 March, when one was at Guntersville, *Marshall* (HHK,MS,BJ). Two Rough-wingeds 9 March at Gulf Shores (GDJ,DGJ), and three 11 March at Marion (GDJ,HHK), were also early. An early Cliff Swallow was in Decatur 29 March (SWM). This species has been expanding its range in recent years, and the southernmost inland Alabama nest was discovered 17 July on the Cahaba R. in *Perry* (ALM,ASC,HHF). Twelve Barn Swallows at Ft. Morgan 7 March (PB,GF) set a new early record for the state. At Guntersville two birds established a new TV arrival date 9 March (ALM,ADM).

**CROWS - WOOD-WARBLERS:** Up to 17 Fish Crows were seen 30 May to 28 July in n. *Bibb* and w. *Jefferson* (TAI,mob), higher than usual numbers for that area. House Wrens are rare breeders in Alabama, but nesting in the MR is becoming regular. Six young were banded at a nest near Birmingham 26 May (RRS,MO). A late Ruby-crowned Kinglet was observed 27 April at Ft. Morgan (GDJ,DGJ). It is difficult to find Am. Robins beyond early April on the coast, so one 23 April near Hurricane, *Baldwin* (PCT,RAD,WJB) was interesting. Warbling Vireos are rare in our area any time. One was near Florence 19-22 April (PDK), and another was at Ft. Morgan 27 April (GDJ,DGJ,mob). Black-whiskered Vireo is a regularly-occurring rarity on the coast in spring. At least six were seen 6 April to 7 May. A sighting on Dauphin I. 6 April (HH) tied the early arrival date for the state.

Twenty Blue-winged Warblers provided a new GC maximum 19 April at Ft. Morgan (BCG,mob). A single bird 20 April at St. Andrews SP, *Bay*, FL (PG,JR,ACM) was considered locally rare. The rare "Brewster's" Warbler, a Blue-winged X Golden-winged hybrid, was seen 21-22 April at Ft. Morgan (JH,JB,GDJ,mob) and 1 May at Ft. Pickens, FL (OEF). Orange-crowned Warblers were late 20 April in *Montgomery* (LG) and 23 April at Ft. Morgan (WJB). The 100 Yellow Warblers at Ft. Morgan 19 April (BCG,mob) set a new GC maximum. A late Magnolia Warbler was singing 2 June in Wheeler NWR, *Morgan* (SWM).

Black-throated Blue Warblers, which generally follow an East Coast route, were seen in higher-than-usual numbers this spring. Peak counts were of 10-12 birds 27 April at Ft. Morgan (GDJ,GF,mob) and eight at Ft. Pickens, FL, 28 April (FL,GF). This species is rare inland, so two males were noteworthy 4 May at Cheaha SP (BCG). Over 70 Black-throated Green Warblers appeared at Ft. Morgan during the fallout 19 April (BCG,mob). A Cerulean Warbler at Ft. Morgan 6 May (JH) provided a new late GC record. Conversely, a new early

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date for the ICP was set by the sighting of a Worm-eating Warbler 31 March in *Montgomery* (LG). A Wilson's Warbler that day at Ft. Pickens, FL (FL,GF) was also early. **Mourning Warblers** are rare throughout our region; a singing bird was heard 25 May in Birmingham (BCG,HHK,p.a.ABRC).

**TANAGERS - FINCHES:** The male **Western Tanager** was a rare find at Dauphin I. 24 April (MLB,VB,acc.ABRC). A Blue Grosbeak observed at Ft. Morgan 9 March (GDJ,DGJ) provided a new early arrival date for Alabama. The 150 Blue Grosbeaks 23 April at St. Joe SP, *Gulf*, FL (R&AI) must have been impressive. This was a great spring for observing transient Dickcissels at the coast. A new GC maximum was set 23 April by the 250 birds at Dauphin I. and Ft. Morgan (GDJ,RAD,WJB,PCT). The same day, 100 were at St. Joe SP, FL (R&AI), and over 75 were present 24 April at Ft. Pickens, FL (GF). Lark Sparrows are difficult to find in spring; a lone bird was at Ft. Morgan 27 April (LRD,WWD,RAD). A rare **Harris' Sparrow** was very cooperative at Ft. Morgan 19 March to 4 May (WF,mob,acc.ABRC), establishing a new late date for the state.

**Shiny Cowbirds** returned for the second year, but not in the numbers of the prior spring. This season, at least four were at Ft. Morgan 12 April to 7 May (JH,mob,acc.ABRC), and four to five birds were at Dauphin I. 12-23 April (AOS,*et al.*). Alabama's fourth record of **Bronzed Cowbird** was provided by a single bird in poor condition at Ft. Morgan 11 April (PB,GF,FL,acc.ABRC). A pair of House Finches, rare but increasing on the coast, was at Marianna, *Jackson*, FL, 18 April (FAP).

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