

SIGHTINGS: SPRING AND SUMMER 2000

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Some seasons overwhelm us with abundance; spring 2000 did not burden us with that challenge. The decrease in *observed* migration was primarily due to dry conditions with little frontal activity, particularly on the coast. However, a great percipitation of transients occurred along the Gulf 24-25 April, and good birding was had there 18 and 22 April as well; at Birmingham, an excellent fall of migrants was experienced 28 April. Despite an overall slow period for regular migrants, several rarities added a flair of excitement. A special investigation of breeding birds in Chilton County 16-18 June uncovered many interesting finds.

March was warm with precipitation high in some areas (Birmingham) and low in others (Montgomery). April was cool throughout, with increased rainfall in the north and less than usual in the south. May, June, and July were warm and dry in most parts of our region.

This report covers the period from March through July 2000 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; these must be considered by the appropriate state records committees. All submissions of birds that are rare, either in general or for a particular season or region, must 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. For guidance, observers are encouraged to consult the recently revised AOS checklist. Reports should note conditions of observation and the diagnostic characters observed. Your help in this matter is appreciated.

Abbreviations and Italics: County names are in italics. Locations not indicating Florida are in Alabama. "b." = banded; "et al." = and others (small number); "FWBSF" = Ft. Walton Beach spray fields, Okaloosa County, FL; "GC" = Gulf Coast (Alabama); "ICP" = Inland Coastal Plain (Alabama); "m.ob." = many observers; "MR" = Mountain Region; "NF" = National Forest; "NWR" = National Wildlife Refuge; "p.a." = pending acceptance by the state bird records committee; "ph." = photographed; "SBC" = Summer Bird Count; "SP" = State Park;

Five early Blue-winged Teal were observed 12 March in *Lauderdale* (PDK); a pair with seven young in *Santa Rosa* 8 May (WM) furnished a scarce WP breeding record. Quite a find for the summer was a male Black Scoter 9 June at Ft. Morgan, *Baldwin* (BL, LF), providing only a second Alabama record for that season. The Long-tailed Duck 14 March in north *Shelby* (PAR) was unusual for the MR. Only occasional on the GC, a male Common Merganser was at Dauphin Island, *Mobile*, 7 April (GEH, m.ob.). Several Red-breasted Mergansers 11 March in *Perry* (DA, PJ) were noteworthy at that season for the ICP. Setting an Alabama maximum, 930 Ruddy Ducks were counted 7 March at Guntersville, *Marshall* (GDJ, DGJ).

RAPTORS TO TERNS

Rare as a breeder in the TV, a pair of Ospreys was observed constructing a nest 19 April on the Tennessee R. west of Florence, *Lauderdale* (DJS). An early Swallow-tailed Kite was spotted in south *Mobile* 8 March (JFP). Rarely-reported, a Swallow-tailed nest was found in north *Baldwin* 22 June (CP, BS, ECS); two large nestlings were present, and one had fledged three days later. Ten of these elegant birds were spotted as far north as south *Pickens* 29 July (GJH, m.ob.), and a single Swallow-tailed 30 July in Vestavia, *Jefferson* (ER) provided only the third MR record. An early Mississippi Kite was in *Elmore* 22 March (RR), and over 100 in the northwestern ICP 29 July (GJH, m.ob.) set a new state maximum. Our national bird continued a slow increase as a breeding bird in Alabama. A nest with two young eagles was located 25 April at Weiss L., *Cherokee* (GLH), and a pair was seen at L. Jordan in *Chilton* 18 June (DTM et al.).

Three American Kestrels, including one pair, in Talladega NF, *Chilton*, 17 June (GDJ, DGJ) were noteworthy; after years of decline, the species appears to be increasing in the state as a breeder. Unusual inland in winter, a Merlin was spotted 11 March in *Perry* (DA, PJ). Annually recorded at Dauphin I., the reclusive Black Rail was heard 26 April (RC et al.). A King Rail called 23 April at Oakland Marsh (JTG), known as a regular spot for this scarce TV species; eleven Kings, including one on a nest, furnished an inland maximum 8 June at WTF (TAP). The American Coot 29 May at East L., *Jefferson* (JL) was late.

Encouraging news for a declining coastal bird, 17 Wilson's Plovers were counted 24 July on the Navarre Flats, *Santa Rosa*, FL (RAD). Very rare in the WP, an

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American Oystercatcher was at Ft. Pickens, *Escambia*, 20 April (LRD). An excellent inland sighting, 12-14 American Avocets were at Wilson Dam near Florence 28 April (DL, GB). In nearby *Colbert* 17 April, 51 Lesser Yellowlegs represented a good inland gathering for spring (DJS); if not summering, three Lessers near Florence 25 June (TMH) probably were early migrants, and were earlier than previous "fall" inland records. The Upland Sandpiper 16 July at WTF (SER) was ahead of schedule. A Whimbrel 22 March at Ft. Pickens (TAP) set a new early WP record, and 42 birds in *Escambia* 20 April (A&DF) furnished a WP maximum. One Long-billed Curlew returned early to the Mobile Causeway 13 July (M&KW). An astounding 40 Marbled Godwits were recorded in *Escambia*, FL, 20 April (A&DF); two were unusual in that county at the early date of 30 July (RAD).

Setting early local records, a Pectoral Sandpiper was in *Shelby* 4 March (MW&JR), and two were at WTF 16 July (SER). First for the WP, a **Curlew Sandpiper** was a shock at FWBSF 12-15 April (RAD, m.ob., v.t. PB, p.a.). Furnishing an early north Alabama date, a Stilt Sandpiper was at Town Creek Marsh, *Colbert*, 23 March (GDJ, DGJ). Also setting an early local record, a Wilson's Phalarope appeared 14 July at FWBSF (DMW). The Red Phalarope 17 March at Vandiver, *Shelby* (DH, HHK, v.t. GDJ, DGJ, p.a.) was only the 19th recorded for the state, and one of few for the MR. Rare inland, single Laughing Gulls were in *Morgan* 13 May (CDC, MSG) and in *Chilton* 17 June (ECS). A flock of 25 Caspian Terns 24 April at Wilson Dam (TMH) was impressive. Early Caspians included a lone bird 2 July in west *Lauderdale* (TMH), setting an early arrival date for inland Alabama, and another 17 July in *Choctaw* (SWM). The Black Tern 8 June near Florence (TMH) was behind schedule.

DOVES TO SWALLOWS

At the northern edge of the breeding range, two pairs of Common Ground-Doves, one with a fledgling, were a surprise 17-18 June in northeast *Chilton* (RRS, MBS). Not often detected inland in migration, a Black-billed Cuckoo was a treat in *Shelby* 5 May (HHW, S&DH). The Yellow-billed Cuckoo 5 April in *Elmore* (PR) furnished an early arrival record for the ICP. Early Chuck-will's-widows included calling birds 27 March at Ft. Morgan (PBI) and 5 April in *Elmore* (RR). Two calling **Vaux's Swifts** were identified 18 April at Ft. Pickens (RAD, p.a.), providing a first WP record. Now regular in the WP, a Buff-bellied Hummingbird was in Pensacola 8 April (JW). Ahead of the pack, a Ruby-throated

Hummingbird furnished an ICP arrival date in *Butler* 7 March (CK). A very rare **Calliope Hummingbird** was banded in Pensacola 2 March (FB, IR et al.).

An outstanding find, a **Tropical Kingbird**, first for the WP, was identified by voice 16 May at Gulf Breeze, *Santa Rosa* (RAD). Rare in spring, a Western Kingbird was spotted 29 April at FWBSF (RAD, PC&BT). Gray Kingbird apparently is still absent as a breeder from the Alabama coast and from Ft. Pickens, FL. The species nested at a few spots this summer on the WP mainland and at Gulf Breeze, FL (*vide* RAD). One Gray Kingbird seen over 100 km inland in north *Baldwin* 3 June (BE, BS, VBF, m.ob.) was quite a surprise, and only the second inland for the state. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher continued a slow but steady increase as a breeder in Alabama, particularly in the TV. This spring and summer, at least 13 birds were discovered in the TV in *Lauderdale* (PDK), *Colbert* (DJS), *Morgan* (SWM, S&DH), *Madison* (KW, HD, DRC, RC et al.) and *Jackson* (JH, D&KJ). The only ICP report this year was of a pair in *Hale* 20 May (DPG). A Scissor-tailed 20 May in southwest *Mobile* (KSF et al.) furnished a new late GC date.

Only the fourth in spring for the GC, a Bell's Vireo was a nice find 28 April at Ft. Morgan (HH, MC). Though Blue-headed Vireo breeds at upper elevations in the Talladega Mountains, two at lower sites in *Randolph* 4 June (RRR) were unusual. Two Warbling Vireos returned early 22 April to the nesting site at Waterloo, *Lauderdale* (JTG). Rare spring coastal records included Warblings 24-25 April at Ft. Morgan (RAD, LRD, BS et al.) and 25 April at Ft. Pickens, FL (RAD, LRD et al.). Black-whiskered Vireo is regular in small numbers on the coast in spring. Three banded at Ft. Morgan 3 April (RRS, MBS, m.ob.) established a new early date for Alabama. Latest of several Ft. Morgan records this year was a singing Black-whiskered 15 May (BS). Fish Crow is rare in most of north Alabama; one was calling in east *Jefferson* 2 April (SWM), four were noted in southeast *Jefferson* 16 April (GDJ, DGJ), and another vocalized in north *Shelby* 2 May (GDJ, DGJ). Three Horned Larks continued at the sole ICP nesting site at WTF 18 May (TAP).

Casual breeders, a pair of Tree Swallows with four young nested this summer at Key Cave NWR, *Lauderdale* (CDC, PDK). It was a banner year for the expanding inland population of Cliff Swallows. Forty were seen as early as 23 March at a normal breeding site in *Lauderdale* (GDJ, DGJ). Many reports were submitted of Cliffs nesting in previously unknown areas. These included birds at Jones

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Bluff Dam, *Lowndes/Autauga*, 11 May (TAP), at L. Wedowee Dam, *Randolph*, 4 June (RRR), over 80 on the Chattahoochee R. in *Russell* 10 June (WFC), a pair in southeast *Chilton* 7 June (GDJ), 254 Cliffs in eastern *Chilton* 17-18 June (AOS), 84 birds on the Black Warrior R., *Hale*, 24 June (SWM), and over 200 at West Point L., *Chambers*, 16 July (GEH). The Cliff Swallows in *Russell* mark the southernmost inland population in Alabama; observers should check farther south on the Chattahoochee, Alabama, and Tombigbee Rivers in coming seasons. Amazing numbers of Cave Swallows were recorded this spring on the coast. Representing the 12th Alabama record, an astounding five birds were at Ft. Morgan 4-12 April (GDJ, DGJ, LRD, m.ob., v.t., p.a.); at least one other was seen 4 April on the Mobile Causeway, *Mobile* (GDJ), for a state maximum of six that day. One Cave Swallow appeared at FWBSF 14-15 April (MR, RRo, RAD, LRD, m.ob.) for a third WP sighting, and another, perhaps one of the Ft. Morgan birds, was spotted at Dauphin I. 16 April (SRM, p.a.). An early Barn Swallow was in Montgomery 9 March (LFG).

NUTHATCHES TO FINCHES

Running behind schedule, a Red-breasted Nuthatch was in the Bankhead NF 6 May (TMH, MA, JTG). Only the eighth in the WP since 1965, a Bewick's Wren was unexpected 9 March at FWBSF (LRD). The pair of Gray Catbirds fledging young this June in Gulf Breeze (RAD, LRD) provided a first WP breeding record. A late American Pipit was observed 24 April in *Lauderdale* (JTG). The flock of Cedar Waxwings 15 May at Dauphin I. (SJP, LP) was tardy; tying a late GC date, a Tennessee Warbler was also seen that day (LP). Rare but regular in spring in north Alabama, a Nashville Warbler was in Birmingham 28 April (LFG), and two were in *Madison* 30 April (GDJ, DGJ). A Northern Parula 23 March in Birmingham (RRR) was early, and a Cape May Warbler 30 April in *Montgomery* (LFG, FB, LM et al.) was unusual for the ICP. Rare inland in spring, a singing Black-throated Blue Warbler was in Birmingham 28 April (LFG). The Blackburnian Warbler 7 April in *Madison* (HD) was ahead of schedule, as were several Yellow-throated Warblers 11 March in *Hale* (DA, PJ). Setting an early ICP date, a singing Blackpoll Warbler was in *Monroe* 13 April (MR, BH).

Unexpected on the Chilton County SBC, and the first in summer for the ICP, singing Ovenbirds were documented 16-17 June in both the northeast and southwest portions of the county (SWM, S&DH). Earliest ever for the ICP, a Swainson's Warbler appeared in *Butler* 31 March (CK); rare in the TV, the regular

bird at Wheeler NWR, *Morgan*, returned 1 May (CDC). A Louisiana Waterthrush furnished an early state record 2 March in *Butler* (CK). Always a treat, two rare Connecticut Warblers were in *Madison* 16 May (MSG, CDC, DRC, RC). Earliest for inland Alabama, an adult male Mourning Warbler was discovered 25 April in Florence (TMH); rare but regular, especially in the TV, singing Mournings were in *Madison* 14 May (MSG) and 25 May (MS). Also in *Madison*, a Wilson's Warbler 16 May (CDC, MSG, DRC, RC) set a TV departure date.

Like the Ovenbirds, four Scarlet Tanagers, including a pair, in west *Chilton* 17 June (PAR, S&DH) were surprising and represented the southernmost June records for Alabama. With only four previous spring records for the state, single Clay-colored Sparrows appeared 22-23 April at Dauphin I. (WJB, m.ob.) and 29 April at Ft. Morgan (BS). Lark Sparrow continued a steady increase as a breeder in the TV and ICP. New sites were discovered in *Lauderdale* (JTG, CDC, PDK, TMH, m.ob.), *Autauga* (SER, LFG, m.ob.), and *Chilton* (GEH). Rare in the WP, a Lincoln's Sparrow was at Ft. Pickens 20-23 March (TAP, MR, SN et al.). An inland surprise, a Painted Bunting was in Auburn 29-30 April (SD).

Latest on record for the TV, a Bobolink was spotted in *Lauderdale* 6 June (CDC). The male Yellow-headed Blackbird at Dauphin I. 29-30 April (JFP, JP) was a rare pleasure. Also on Dauphin, a male Shiny Cowbird 21-22 April (KN, JRW, ph., p.a.) furnished the 18th Alabama record. Possibly breeding in a new area of the state, a Baltimore Oriole was singing 4 June in *Randolph* (RRR). Eight Red Crossbills continued into the spring in *Cleburne* (BS). Two tarrying Pine Siskins were in east *Jefferson* to 25 May (RRS).

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