

A O S F A L L M E E T I N G , O C T O B E R 1 0 - 1 2 , 2 0 0 8

Fall Meeting Report

By GREGORY J. HARBER



I WAS UNABLE TO ATTEND THE AOS SPRING MEETING on Dauphin Island so, like many who long for a place they treasure but are unable to visit as often as they'd like, I especially looked forward to the fall meeting. Once I crested the Dauphin Island bridge I knew in my heart that I had finally arrived at this place we all hold so near and dear, and it seemed as though the miles and months that had separated us dissolved to nothingness.

The Friday night gathering was held at Mary's Place in Coden. This was new for me and I enjoyed the chance to mingle with everyone and to try out the new cuisine offerings. The Chamber Hall had been a faithful standby all these years, but I know that readying that hall each meeting weekend was a challenge for the meetings committee. I know they appreciated the reprieve, and this reminded me how much I appreciate their dedicated efforts through the years. Following our usual members' favorite slides show and Linda's announcements, the gathering quickly disbanded to allow everyone the chance to get to bed early in anticipation of a good weekend of birding.

Saturday's field trips were limited to two choices: Linda and Dick Reynolds handled the island hotspots tour while I led a small group to Pelican Island. Unlike past years when we relied on Terry Hartley and John Stowers to ferry us across, this year we simply waded the shallows at the public beach. This had been my first chance to exploit firsthand the sand-shifting effects of recent hurricanes.

A variety of shorebirds, gulls, terns, and a clownish Reddish Egret greeted us on the flats beyond the pier. Everyone enjoyed close looks at Piping and Snowy Plovers, plodding and probing their way around the shallow puddles in the mud. The egret occasionally burst into the crazed dance routine so readily apparent when a meal is afoot.

Word soon reached us that a Bewick's Wren had been sighted behind Fort Gaines, so many in the group opted to pursue this rare visitor to Alabama. By the time I arrived

the bird had disappeared into the ample vegetation behind the fort and adjacent to the Sea Lab. We had no luck with the wren but the quest gave me a new appreciation for the myriad wildlife and birdlife that lies so closely underfoot, and yet which we so readily overlook.

Once again, John and Jenny Stowers hosted lunch for the meeting participants at their home overlooking the Sound. If ever there were a more enjoyable aspect of any of our island meetings I am certainly not aware of it. The combination of good food and camaraderie of good friends is one of the highlights I treasure most.

It wasn't long before news of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Western Kingbird at Albright Street began circulating. Drifting in from the west end were reports of a Lesser Black-backed Gull and a Peregrine Falcon among the thousands of birds loitering on the flats at the cut created and widened by the hurricanes. All weekend long, visitors wandered there to view the birds and the new island landmark. Time will tell whether the cut and the new land bridge to Pelican Island are permanent features.

Pete Conroy was the speaker at the Saturday night banquet and program, also held at Mary's Place. While I have admired Pete's conservation and educational outreach accomplishments for many years, I suspect that for many present this was the first time they were aware of these achievements. They offer a testament to the good that can happen when people of goodwill set goals and work together to achieve them. The people of Alabama are the ultimate beneficiaries and I salute Pete for guiding these determined efforts.

Following compilation at the Goat Trees Reserve on Sunday at noon we departed for home, comfortable with the knowledge that our beloved island—despite a few landscape alterations—was still the birdiest small coastal city in America. I look forward to seeing everyone at the 5 Rivers Delta Nature Center for the winter meeting in January. And by the way, 5 Rivers is another Alabama treasure we can call our own.