

JANUARY 26-28, 2007, THE INN AT WILDWOOD, CRAWFORDVILLE, FLORIDA

Winter Meeting Report

By GREGORY J. HARBER



BEGAN TO LOOK AHEAD TO OUR WINTER MEETING THE moment Stan Hamilton mentioned it would be held at Crawfordville, Florida, near St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. I suspect others felt the same way. What could be better than a trip to the coast in the dead of winter (regardless of the temperature), with the prospect of great birdlife for which the region is noted and the company of friends new and old? Throw in a delightful and informative presentation by Denver Holt and you too would agree that this was indeed a fabulous meeting; everyone with whom I have spoken since has said they thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Undoubtedly many of us cast a wistful glance to either side of the road as we crossed the Choctawhatchee River on our route to Crawfordville, wondering if Ivory-billed Woodpeckers still roam these floodplain forests and whispering a silent prayer for the ghostly bird and its haven.

I arrived at the Inn at Wildwood late Friday afternoon and was immediately bombarded with reports of good birds from every corner: Red-throated Loons, Black Scoters, Merlin. Clearly St. Marks was already living up to its reputation.

The evening social was highlighted by a presentation from Rick West, delivering a final update on the Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas with a sincere thank you to everyone who contributed to the project. (I'll second Rick's sentiments). This being Florida, and me being a native Floridian, I opted to feature Florida scenery and birds in my member's favorite slides presentation, with accompaniment from "Behind the Waterfall."

Saturday morning we were presented with two field trip options: St. Marks with Bob and Lucy Duncan, or Wakulla Springs with Dick and Linda Reynolds? Talk about tough choices! I opted for St. Marks with the Duncans, as did many others, but the Wakulla trip was just as productive I learned later—Aningas and an American Bittern!

Once we arrived at the refuge it became clear that we'd need to split into two groups, so Stan and Dana Hamilton

and I guided the second group to the spots the Duncans had just left, leapfrogging our way to the lighthouse. Winter passerines were evident at each of our stops and a river otter was a bonus for sure. Shorebirds dominated the field on the exposed flats at the impoundments. The morning sun gave us a chance to utilize little-appreciated field marks on these birds: silhouette, and its twin, feeding behavior.

Gathering together at the lighthouse the Duncans gave a brief lesson in distinguishing Nelson's and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows. Both species were located in the grasses along the shoreline but the Nelson's offered the superior view. A Marbled Godwit in the Lighthouse Pool appeared rather stoic amidst its short-legged cousins.

Tearing myself away from the group at lunchtime I raced back to the Inn to join Rick West's afternoon trip to the Bottoms Road section of the refuge and other nearby birding hotspots. The Red-throated Loon eluded us but a raft of Black Scoters yielded distant views at Mashers Island County Park. Although they are mundane little shorebirds, I couldn't help but admire the cryptically patterned Semipalmated Plovers hunkered down on the beach mere yards from where we stood behind our scopes. Without the aid of binoculars they literally melted into the patchwork of pebbles and sand on the beach. We concluded our trip at Rick's beach cottage, where his wife Joan waited with hot chocolate. Yummy!

I already mentioned that Denver Holt's program about Snowy Owls was delightful and informative. One adjective I also need to include is "energetic." Either Denver found the fabled Fountain of Youth on his way to Florida or he killed the Energizer Bunny and stole his battery packs. On top of it all, his photographs of the owls were incredible. Surely we all gained a newfound appreciation for the arctic environment, the beauty bound by its frozen grip and the creatures that survive there through the toughest of elements. This landscape, without doubt, cradles a refuge deserving of our deep respect and reverence. Adding a special touch to the

weekend was the presentation of the Tom Imhof Lifetime Achievement Award to Rick West in recognition of his dedicated efforts to the Atlas.

Sunday morning dawned wet and a little chilly, but the overnight rain had moved east, unveiling a freshly scrubbed plate. The lure of the Bittern at Wakulla proved too tempting for many; Don Ware led another group back to St. Marks and the Hamiltons and I once again teamed for a trip to Bald Point State Park and Alligator Point. No loon for us—still—but a Piping Plover was a nice consolation prize. No matter,

the tiny starfish littering the beach had us all looking at the ground anyway!

Compilation was held an hour earlier than usual to allow time for the Duncans and their roving band of merry birders to head east to Steinhatchee and points beyond. The final tally for the weekend was 158 species and many, many satisfied customers. Kudos to Stan and Dana Hamilton, Frank and Shirley Farrell and the trip leaders for a job well done, and a special thanks to Denver Holt for sharing his passion with us.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2007

AOS Board Meeting

By LINDA REYNOLDS



THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER BY PRESIDENT Stan Hamilton. The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

Frank Farrell, Treasurer, reported a balance of \$15,066 less expenses of the January meeting. Mr. Farrell reported that *Alabama Birdlife* must pay back taxes amounting to \$403.40 resulting from a recent audit.

Greg Harber, Conservation Chair, reported he had written a letter to TVA objecting to privatizing public land with a copy going to Rep. Bud Cramer. He also reported correspondence to the FCC asking them to use a proven tower design to minimize mortality of migrating birds.

Annabel Markle, Publications Chair, reported that a new brochure is being designed and she asked for ideas. After discussion, she stated she will be in touch by e-mail. Ms. Markle also reported that the new T-shirt design is progressing and the board voted to sell new shirts at the spring meeting.

Dr. Rick West, Atlas Chair, emphasized that the data belongs to AOS and we must assume responsibility for the preservation of this information and also the prior data in the archives.

Dr. John Porter, reporting for DIBS, stated that 300 Grant Street has been purchased. This lot had been a survey dispute but that will be finally resolved in the very near future. Dr. Porter also stated that we should be receiving a grant

soon for more land in the Steiner block from the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory.

Dr. Porter reported that in the spring of 2007, the competition for "Birdiest City" will be held in conjunction with the AOS meeting.

Dr. Porter reported that a new checklist will be printed which reflects changes by AOU.

Larry Gardella is working on a new membership CD and will report back. (See his article in this *Yellowhammer*.)

Stan Hamilton urged the board to be thinking of potential recipients of the Imhof Award and the AOS Conservation Award. He also suggested that the board may want to vote for some funding for Dr. Geoff Hill's research project in Florida. The board approved a donation of \$1,000.

Deadlines for *Yellowhammer* Submissions

Summer 2007	June 10, 2007
Fall 2007	August 12, 2007
Winter 2007	November 15, 2007

Important Dates

THIRD FRIDAY—April 20–22, 2007

Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

SECOND FRIDAY—October 12–14, 2007

Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 26–28, 2008

Winter Meeting, TBA