

AOS WINTER MEETING, JANUARY 23-25, 2009

Winter Meeting Report

By GREGORY J. HARBER



OSH, WHERE TO BEGIN? THERE WERE SO MANY fabulous aspects to the AOS winter meeting weekend, it's hard to know where to start. The location at the 5 Rivers Delta Nature Center was a beautiful setting for our Friday and Saturday night gatherings. The facility, with its museum, gift shop, auditorium and banquet room, is a veritable gateway to the delta, and I hope it will become a regular venue for future AOS meetings.

The birding tone for the weekend was cast when Pelham Rowan and I arrived Friday night and immediately learned from the Sargents (great to see you there, Bob and Martha!) and Venetia Friend that an adult male Broad-billed Hummingbird had appeared that day at the feeders at Venetia's house in Montrose. Talk about a surprise lunch guest!

Later, once Linda Reynolds opened the meeting with the field trip announcements, we learned that at least two species of orioles and Rufous and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were being reported from Jim Dickerson's home in Lillian. Not to be outdone, the Magnolia Springs landfill was hosting as many as five Lesser Black-backed Gulls and the as-yet-to-be identified all-white gull that has kept many experienced birders puzzled about its identity. The Mud Lakes would be the third field trip destination.

The member's favorite slides consisted of three presentations. Bill McAllister showed images from his recent trip to Chile and Argentina. As Bill demonstrated, you should always carry your binoculars whenever traveling because, even though his was not a birding trip, he did encounter and photograph some spectacular birds.

John Trent enlivened the tone a bit with a multimedia presentation about a December 2008 bird banding expedition to the expansive salt marshes at the Isle of Herbes south of Coden. John, Eric Soehren and Dr. Bill Summerour, with the help of several able-bodied volunteers, netted and banded Nelson's Sharp-tailed and Seaside Sparrows and a Clapper Rail.

I followed up with some digiscoped images of the birdlife I encountered at my parent's house near Sebastian, Florida, over the holidays. Perhaps the image of the Wood Stork yawning was the appropriate way to tell everyone it was time to get to bed!

Saturday morning dawned cloudy with a steady, dripping rain as we gathered at the Battleship Best Western Inn to depart for the day's trips. Pelham Rowan and I opted for the Mud Lakes (how appropriate, given the weather) as he had never been there, and it had been ages since my last visit. As soon as we crested the embankment leading into the Mud Lakes we spotted a small flock of Black-necked Stilts to our left. Right away I knew we had made a good decision; these birds with their delicate fine-stemmed glassware features, are an incredible sight. A host of ducks was scattered about the ponds; their brilliant plumage muted by the overcast skies and intermittent rain. Perhaps the most unusual species seen on the trip was a flock of five White-crowned Sparrows. Their delicate markings illustrate so well how even though we often think of sparrows as being dull and drab, they really are a study in sublime beauty.

I suspect all of that day's field trips ended the way ours did, with the decision to proceed without haste to Venetia's house to see her magnificent house guest! Indeed this was one very beautiful and cooperative bird, with good looks all around for anyone willing to wait for his regular appearances. Fred Bassett and the Sargents had to wait all of two seconds for the bird to enter the trap when Fred arrived with his banding gear at 3:00 that afternoon. This fifth state record Broad-billed Hummingbird is now wearing a dainty ankle bracelet as a memento of his winter foray into Alabama.

The steady stream of bird sighting reports ebbed and flowed with the crowd at Venetia's home. The debate on the orioles at the Dickerson home settled on Baltimore and a potential first state record Hooded Oriole, now since confirmed by diagnostic photographs and call notes. Holy Cow! Also seen on the return was a lone Ross's Goose with two Snow Geese.

The gulls did not disappoint at the landfill, either. The only bird that one might have hoped to see but didn't was the Snow Bunting first reported from there in early January. It does say a lot about the tastes of birders when toxic waste ponds and landfills are can't-miss birding destinations! As Chazz Hesselein said about Mud Lakes, if you can get past the trash and commotion, the place has a quiet beauty. I called it the two faces of Alabama.

The Saturday night banquet at 5 Rivers was a treat, with catering duties being handled by a crew new to AOS. Thanks go to Tom and Joan Siegwald for arranging the details. While perusing the signage in the banquet room that I learned that the paneling adorning the walls was planed from 150-year-old logs recovered from the bottom of the Choctawhatchee River, sunk during the days when logs were moved downriver to the mills.

Prior to the evening program, Howard Horne and I had the distinct pleasure of unveiling the new Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas. We took advantage of the Internet access available to us and "went live" to show everyone present the results of their years of atlas survey efforts. Many thanks to all who contributed, and a special thank you to Dr. Tom Haggerty, who worked so diligently with the data to create a first-rate and attractive website. It is a treasure trove of information about the breeding birds of Alabama.

Roger Clay, our program speaker, gave a delightful, insightful, and witty program about the nature of his job as a biologist in the state's Non-Game Wildlife Program. The tremendous success of their Bald Eagle restoration project is the main reason so many eagles now nest throughout our state, so my hat's off to them. His work with the many species of seabirds that nest on Gaillard Island was of great interest too. Lastly, the humorous touch he applied to his "other duties as assigned" makes me appreciate all the more the fact that I don't have to deal with the public in my job.

Sunday morning was still cloudy and overcast, but the passing cold front had dropped the temperatures considerably. After saying goodbye to John and Mary Porter, our hosts on Dauphin Island, Pelham and I drove to the East End in search of the White-winged Scoter that had been reported from there earlier in the week by Greg Jackson. After some searching with Helen Kittinger and her family, the bird was located at the public boat launch near the ferry landing. Thanks, Jo, for coming back to let us know!

Satisfied with our quota of rare birds for the weekend, I pointed my car back toward Birmingham. A majestic female Anhinga, soaring at the level of the tall interstate highway spans above the Mobile Delta, was the last bird we saw during our AOS weekend. With any luck, it will be the first one I see when I head back in the spring.

Summary of Board Meeting Minutes

By JOAN SIEGWALD, *Secretary*



THE AOS EXECUTIVE BOARD MET SATURDAY, January 24, 2009, at the Best Western Motel on the Mobile Bay Causeway in Mobile, Alabama. President Linda Reynolds called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Treasurer's Report: Mary Frances Stayton reported an AOS checking account balance of approximately \$20,690 with winter meeting expenses still to be paid. Our \$25,000 certificate of deposit has been transferred and will mature in six months.

DIBS Report: Greg Harber reported that John Porter is continuing to pursue acquisition of Pelican Island and is close to closing on two lots in the Steiner block. Greg asked

about having the Birdiest City competition in conjunction with the AOS spring meeting again this year. Board members agreed that this would be a good idea.

Conservation Report: Greg Harber reported that he had submitted comments on Senate Bill 22 that establishes many new wilderness areas but also includes a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

Old Business

Membership Directory: Linda said that the AOS membership directory is being distributed at this meeting. Bob Reed put the directory together, and Eric Soehren brought the copies down for the meeting.

Breeding Bird Atlas: Greg Harber reported that the Breeding Bird Atlas website is up and running and will be announced at tonight's meeting. He commented that Tom Haggerty did an excellent job of organizing the data and setting up the website.

AOS Website: Eric reported that he has contacted several people about being on the website committee; one person is interested and Eric is waiting to hear back from others. One person who has experience in building websites for wildlife organizations has submitted a proposal for rebuilding the AOS website. Eric distributed copies of the proposal to the board for their review. The objectives listed in the proposal encompassed all the website changes that have been discussed at previous meetings. These changes include, among other things, making the website more attractive and easier to navigate and making all volumes of *Alabama Birdlife* and *The Yellowhammer* available in a searchable database. Board members liked the proposal but wanted to get input from other Board members before making a decision. Linda and Eric will follow up on this.

Alabama Birdlife: Tom Siegwald reported that he has scanned all but six of the 1973-1995 issues of *Alabama Birdlife* that he has. He is missing a number of issues from the series; after compiling a list of the missing issues, he will e-mail the list to several AOS members who may have copies of them.

Certificate of Deposit Interest: Linda commented that service organizations like AOS usually put their money to work to further their mission and goals. AOS has a \$25,000 certificate of deposit that is earning interest. Although we cannot spend any of the lifetime membership corpus in the CD, we can use the interest it earns. Linda suggested that AOS periodically take some of the interest and make it available as grant money for student research or other projects we would like to support. She asked Board members to think about this issue for discussion at a future meeting.

New Business

Silent Auction: Eric asked if there is any interest in holding silent auctions at future meetings to generate revenue for various AOS initiatives (i.e. small grants, DIBS funds, etc.). Members would bring items to donate for the auction. Linda suggested that we postpone this until we are no longer meeting at Mary's Place because of space limitations there. Board

members agreed that silent auctions could be a good idea and should be discussed later.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:15 p.m.

2009 AOS Winter Meeting Compilation List 5 Rivers Delta, Alabama, January 23-25

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF the weekend included Glossy Ibis, Greater Black-backed Gull, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Sprague's Pipit, and Hooded Oriole.

Snow Goose
Ross's Goose
Canada Goose
Gadwall
Mallard
Mottled Duck
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Greater Scaup
Lesser Scaup
White-winged Scoter
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
American White Pelican
Brown Pelican
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron

Reddish Egret
Cattle Egret
Black-crowned Night-Heron
White Ibis
Glossy Ibis
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Clapper Rail
Sora
Common Moorhen
American Coot
Black-bellied Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Piping Plover
Killdeer
American Oystercatcher
Black-necked Stilt
Spotted Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Willet
Lesser Yellowlegs
Ruddy Turnstone
Sanderling
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Dunlin
Stilt Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Snipe
Laughing Gull

Bonaparte's Gull
 Ring-billed Gull
 Herring Gull
 Lesser Black-backed Gull
Greater Black-backed Gull
 Caspian Tern
 Forster's Tern
 Royal Tern
 Rock Pigeon
 Eurasian Collared-Dove
 White-winged Gull
 Mourning Dove
 Common Ground-Dove
 Barn Owl
 Great Horned Owl
Broad-billed Hummingbird
Buff-bellied Hummingbird
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Black-chinned Hummingbird
Rufous Hummingbird
 Belted Kingfisher
 Red-headed Woodpecker
 Red-bellied Woodpecker
 Downy Woodpecker
 Pileated Woodpecker
 Eastern Phoebe
 Loggerhead Shrike
 Blue-headed Vireo
 Blue Jay
 American Crow
 Fish Crow
 Tree Swallow
 Carolina Chickadee
 Tufted Titmouse
 Brown-headed Nuthatch
 Carolina Wren
 House Wren
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
 Eastern Bluebird
 Hermit Thrush
 American Robin
 Gray Catbird
 Northern Mockingbird
 Brown Thrasher
 European Starling
 American Pipit
Sprague's Pipit
 Cedar Waxwing
 Orange-crowned Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler
 Yellow-throated Warbler
 Pine Warbler
 Palm Warbler
 Common Yellowthroat
 Eastern Towhee
 Chipping Sparrow
 Field Sparrow
 Savannah Sparrow
 Henslow's Sparrow
 Seaside Sparrow
 Song Sparrow
 Swamp Sparrow
 White-throated Sparrow
 White-crowned Sparrow
 Northern Cardinal
 Red-winged Blackbird
 Eastern Meadowlark
 Common Grackle
 Boat-tailed Grackle
 Brown-headed Cowbird
 Orchard Oriole
 Baltimore Oriole
 Hooded Oriole
 House Finch
 Pine Siskin
 American Goldfinch
 House Sparrow

All reported sightings will be accepted and published in *The Yellowhammer*. However, the meeting compilation list in *The Yellowhammer* is not an official record. Species that are **boldfaced**, or listed in the Hypothetical section of the AOS Field Card, must be supported by complete written details and submitted to, and accepted by, the Records Committee to become an official AOS record. *Italicized species* usually need written details but these may be brief. Out of season and locally rare birds should also be documented. Refer to the front page of the AOS Field Card for additional details.