

JANUARY 25–27, 2008, JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, ALABAMA

2008 Winter Meeting Report

By GREGORY J. HARBER



TRANQUILITY AND IDLE VICE: THOSE WERE THE names of two sailboats moored in their slips in the marina at Joe Wheeler State Park, site of the Winter AOS meeting. I spied them through the dining hall window while eating breakfast that Sunday morning and thought to myself how nicely they summarized the weekend's events.

Frank and Shirley Farrell greeted us at the registration table after we'd checked into our room late Friday. Soon, the gathering twilight brought the day's birding to a close and herded everyone indoors for some socializing. Linda Reynolds welcomed everyone to the meeting, introduced our guests and made a few announcements before we began the member's favorite slides program—a perennial favorite enjoyed by all. Certainly, the Short-eared Owl reported by Stan and Dana Hamilton at Key Cave NWR caught our attention and whetted our appetites for the weekend's birding trips!

Saturday morning dawned cold and overcast, the mist gingerly clinging to the river's surface. Predictions of wintry weather did not materialize and so the birding plans laid out Friday night went forward as planned; but still, the Ring-billed Gulls loitering on the dock outside our room didn't seem inclined to depart quite yet. Linda and Dick Reynolds led a group through the park and surrounding environs, Eric Soehren marshaled the troops traveling to Wheeler NWR to join Dwight Cooley, the refuge manager, while Stan and Dana led a smaller caravan to Florence, where Paul Kittle and Damien Simbeck were waiting. I joined this last group headed west to Waterloo—Ron and I were in search of Bald Eagles and we thought the Tennessee River in northwest Alabama was a sure bet.

Our first stop at the huge gravel bar scored the first of many impressive birds for us that morning. Two eagles, an adult and an immature, were visible from where we stood on the rocky shore. Coots, coots and more coots were visible in all directions, but incredibly even these numbers were less than what had been recorded on the CBC weeks earlier. The next stop provided one of the most exciting birds of the

weekend when Damien found a female Black Scoter. The sighting was species #300 on Damien's Tennessee Valley list, adding even more significance to the find.

Following several stops near the community of Waterloo, located in the extreme northwest corner of the state, we drove back east toward the Natchez Trace. Along our route we encountered more eagles (!) and a Ross's Goose to boot. Purple Finches feeding on the ground beneath the cedar trees at Colbert's Ferry boat landing, on the south side of the river, were a bonus for me. I hadn't seen any for the past several years.

Lunchtime found us indoors at the Oakland Café, a mom and pop place plunked down at a rural Limestone County crossroads. Key Cave NWR was next on the itinerary, but alas no Short-eared Owls were to be found upon our mid-afternoon arrival. Savannah Sparrows were plentiful in the grassy windswept expanses, however, and the temperatures began to fall as the clouds slowly cleared away, revealing a bright blue sky in their absence. When we made it back to our rooms, we were greeted by an even dozen American White Pelicans feeding right behind the lodge.

The evening program featured Jill Wick and Lisa Garner-Barillas, two graduate students under the direction of Yong Wang at Alabama A&M University in Huntsville, whose field study sites are in the Bankhead National Forest and the Forever Wild Walls of Jericho tract. The two spoke of their work and research methods and offered us a glimpse of the birdlife in these two remote areas of Alabama. It is encouraging to know their research may lead to a better understanding of the intricacies of bird migration and more knowledge-based management decisions in the future.

Sunday morning was bright and crisp by comparison, and birding was on one's own. News of the very accommodating Red-breasted Nuthatches near the new lakeside cabins (very nice, by the way) had many staying close to the lodge. They led to some folks having a three-nuthatch weekend. Others, knowing it is a long way back to south Alabama, opted to leave early and make a stop at Wheeler NWR on the way home.

Compilation was a small affair, with a handful of birders on hand to tally the 115 species of birds observed over the course of the weekend. The Cackling Geese and Whooping Cranes at Wheeler NWR were at the top of the ooh-ah list, for sure, but the cast of characters—consisting of all the other birds seen during weekend—completed the scene. It had indeed been an idle and tranquil weekend, and as for the vice—merely a loose collection of thoroughly satisfying birding moments with friends. I can hardly wait for spring!

2008 AOS Winter Meeting Compilation List, Joe Wheeler State Park, AL, January 25-27

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE weekend included Cackling Goose and Whooping Crane.

White-fronted Goose
Snow Goose
Ross's Goose
Cackling Goose
Canada Goose
Gadwall
American Wigeon
American Black Duck
Mallard
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback
Ring-necked Duck
Greater Scaup
Lesser Scaup
Black Scoter
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Wild Turkey
Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
American White Pelican
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron

Great Egret
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
American Kestrel
Peregrine Falcon
American Coot
Whooping Crane
Sandhill Crane
Killdeer
Greater Yellowlegs
Least Sandpiper
Wilson's Snipe
Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Forster's Tern
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Mourning Dove
Short-eared Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
Eastern Phoebe
Loggerhead Shrike
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Horned Lark
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Red-headed Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown-headed Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Carolina Wren
Winter Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Northern Mockingbird
Brown Thrasher
European Starling
American Pipit
Cedar Waxwing
Orange-crowned Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Pine Warbler
Palm Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Eastern Towhee
Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Lapland Longspur
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Rusty Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle
Purple Finch
House Finch
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.

Important Dates

THIRD FRIDAY—April 18–20, 2008

Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

SECOND FRIDAY—October 10-12, 2008

Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 23–25, 2009

Winter Meeting, TBA