

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 24, NO. 3 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY FALL 2004

...to foster a greater knowledge of birds and to promote conservation of all natural resources

FOUNDED 1952



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A Protracted Affair

FALL MIGRATION IS A PROTRACTED affair. It starts in the summer and lasts well into winter. As I write this in mid-August, there have already been many posts on the Internet about fall migrants.

The first to arrive in Alabama in good numbers, of course, are the shorebirds and perhaps the best places to see fall shorebirds are Alabama's many sod farms. In particular, the large collection of sod farms in Baldwin County, the Woerner Turf and Sod Farm in Lowndes County, and the Harpersville sod farm in Shelby County. These farms have been extremely productive, especially after a little rain; however rain is not terribly important as these fields are regularly irrigated. These sod farms are generally very birder friendly, but that could change if only one birder fails in some way to respect this privilege. Remember that these are working areas, and not recreational areas. The best day for birding is Sunday, when there are usually no workers present. Be especially careful of the roads. A certain unnamed past president buried his car up to the antenna—well, almost—simply trying to ease to the side of the road. Sod farmers frown on that.

The fall is a particularly good time to look for Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, and sod farms, especially the ones in Baldwin County, are the best places.

Many fall migrants, chiefly passerines, surf southward on the crests of cold fronts. Immediately after one of these cold fronts has passed can be a fabulous time to see all sorts of birds. Many of these fronts are accompanied by rain, and while the trees are still dripping, you may also find them dripping with birds. If it is a *light* rain, you may want to venture out; many warblers, including several that are



not common in Alabama during spring migration, may be your reward. But timing is critical. Within a short time after the passing of a front, most of the migrants will be back on the road.

Last year, during a light rain in early October, I was out in the woods behind my house and saw a flock including Chestnut-sided, Golden-winged, Nashville, Tennessee, and Black-throated Green Warblers, plus American Redstart, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager and White-eyed Vireos. An hour later, when Pat came home, I took her out to see them, and almost every migrant was gone. Before they left, I had enjoyed 29 species in the immediate vicinity of the house, not a record, but a nice collection nonetheless.

Even without a front, passerines, notably warblers and vireos, travel in large mixed flocks. Generally quiet during migration, they can easily be overlooked. Chickadees and titmice do not travel with these flocks, but they do tend to join them while they are in the area. Chickadees and titmice *are* noisy, and they may be your only vocal signal that other birds are present. I always caution new birders never to dismiss the sound of a chickadee.

Two days before my big flock at home, on a bright sunny day, I had a similar experience at Old St. Stephens. I was in the midst of a flock of at least 50 individuals, trying feverishly to see them all. One moment I was surrounded with birds, and five minutes later, there were none. By the way, these observations didn't come strictly from memory, but from the logs we

have kept for the past 10 years or so.

What is the point of this piece? Just this: while one can make his or her own opportunities, birders need to take each opportunity as it comes. Enjoy what is available. Good advice for other facets of life, even if I do say so myself. Enjoy the birds.



Alaska by Sea and Ground



ON JULY 15, ANDREA AND I flew to Vancouver, B.C., along with her parents,

for a 2-week Alaska vacation. We chose an itinerary that would not be too taxing for her parents (who are pushing 80), and that would allow us to partake of some of the beauty of southeastern, southern and central Alaska—and let me do a fair amount of birding.

We had to change planes in Salt Lake City, and I was able to identify a California Gull from the E-Terminal, then on to B.C. By the time we got our rental car and checked into our hotel, it was almost time to get ready for dinner. I drove us to a good Malaysian restaurant (Banana Leaf) and parked in an unattended parking garage—not noticing the sign saying the gate would be locked at 7 pm. So, we had to take a cab back to the hotel. The next morning, I took a long route to the garage and saw Glaucous-winged Gull, Black-capped Chickadee, White-crowned Sparrow and several other birds before arriving before the garage opened. The gate was unlocked, so I just drove back to the hotel.

After a quick breakfast, Andrea and I drove to Cypress Provincial Park. At the first pay station, we saw Band-tailed Pigeons, a singing Willow Flycatcher, a Warbling Vireo, some Rufous Hummers and another bigger-headed hummer that had some gorget feathers but not a hint of rufous or buffy tones. The park list did not include Anna's, but that's what it appeared to be. A local birder, Larry Cowan, later said that a male Anna's had a territory a bit below the spot we found our bird. We hiked briefly on a trail to the chalet, walked the Yew Lake Trail, checked the sky from the Cypress Bowl parking lot and stopped a few places going down. From the bowl we had Vaux's Swift and Black Swift in view at the same time. Some of our other birds included Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Hermit, Swainson's, and Varied (heard) Thrush, Western Tanager and Spotted Towhee.



Vancouver was wonderful: great parks, great food and great ambience.

We boarded the Coral Princess in Vancouver at 1 p.m. That day and all of the next we stayed out at sea. I set up my tripod and scope on the balcony outside our tenth deck room and spent some time looking at gulls, Common Murres and Marbled Murrelets. Before turning in the first night, we were able to see the red afterglow of a great sunset. It's good we enjoyed it. Once we got farther north, it was light when we went to bed and light early the next morning.

Sunday morning, I went down to deck 7 from which I could check out birds near the water surface. The view from the front was blocked, however. I went up to the top deck for a 360-degree view. But there was colored plastic there, plus it's quite far from the water. I did spot a Bald Eagle on a large cross and shared it with some fellow passengers.

After breakfast, I listened to the naturalist talking on whales and bears. Ironically, while she spoke, some of the crew (and presumably some passengers) got to see the only Orcas for the journey, a pod the crew had seen in the same area when the ship was heading south. When the talk was over, I saw 100 porpoises, a group of Cassin's Auklets and a Pink-footed Shearwater. I went back to find the naturalist still answering questions and heard someone ask about a dark porpoise he had briefly seen. I mentioned seeing the white sides on the higher-jumping porpoises, and the naturalist ID'd them as White-sided Porpoises. We also discussed birds—and she suggested I go through doors marked for "emergency use" to get a view from the front of the 10th or 11th deck. The people on the captain's bridge waved to me when I got there, and crew members assured me passengers were permitted there. Since few knew that, it was a great place from which to watch in peace. I spent much time there during the rest of the trip.

On my first day looking from the bow on the 10th deck, I saw good numbers of Cassin's Auklets and Rhinoceros Auklets, along with Common Murres and Marbled Murrelets. Several of the Common Murres were paired up—an adult with a half-sized fledgling.

In Ketchikan I hiked up Deer Mountain without finding many birds—and without taking a camera to memorialize a great view of the Princess. I was supposed to meet Andrea and her mother in town but missed them. Too bad; Andrea's non-birding mother looked into the creek as they crossed it and said "What's that bird?" She had spotted an American Dipper. The ship pulled out in mid-afternoon. Just before my birthday dinner, I looked out from our balcony and saw a young Long-tailed Jaeger harassing a pair of Bonaparte's Gulls.

After disembarking for a day in Juneau, Andrea and I started out at the wetlands. Lots of Bald Eagles, a clump of River Otters and a nice mix of warblers and sparrows. And a missed opportunity. While we were walking back from the mouth of Mendenhall River, we noticed a group of people on the dike trail looking out with binoculars. It turned out that they had seen a young Black Bear cross the trail between them and us.

After taking Andrea and her folks back to the ship, I went out near the glacier one last time and did a climb. Birds on the way up included Townsend's Warbler, Wilson's Warbler and American Redstart.

We left at dark for Skagway. When I disembarked the next morning, I went up to Lower Dewey Lake and then explored in several directions without heading uphill to Upper Dewey. I saw a female Western Tanager on that first trip and then a male when I returned to the same spot later in the day with Andrea. In the same area, I saw one of the only two woodpeckers I saw in Alaska: a Red-breasted Sapsucker. A bit down another trail, I had the only other: a Northern Three-toed Woodpecker low on some trees across from a steep clearing.

From Skagway, it is not far to Glacier Bay. The series of views from the front of deck 10 was sensational—even though I managed to miss both a Black and Brown Bear. Most of the puffins were Tufted, but Andrea spotted a Horned Puffin on the way in, and we saw another in about the same spot on the way out. Right next to a glacier, we saw a group of three Black Oystercatchers. A murrelet that took off as the ship approached showed much white in its tail,

revealing it to be a Kittlitz's. Both on the way in and on the way out, Hump-backed Whales put on a display.

From Glacier Bay to College Fjord, the ship crossed much open water. When I woke up and got to the front of deck 10 at about 6:00, I could see a large island to the north and east that I believe was Kayak Island. Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters showed up in front of the ship, allowing me to study the differences in wing beat and wing shape. A whale kicked up its flukes a good distance from the ship. From the shape, I could readily tell it was not a Hump-backed or an Orca, but I could not make an ID.

College Fjord was different from, but as beautiful as, Glacier Bay. We missed another Brown Bear, but this time I spotted a Black Bear and got most of the people in the front of the ship on it.

While we were near the ship in Whittier waiting for our limo, Andrea spotted a Bald Eagle carrying a large salmon. I watched it go to a nest with young. The limo took us to Anchorage to pick up the rental car we used to drive to Homer to start the land portion of our vacation. Thinking back, I was surprised at how much I enjoyed our first cruise.

GOING FROM WHITTIER TO HOMER by way of Anchorage was a bit of a long trip, but beautiful all the way. Great views of glaciers and mountains and a chance to watch a major tidal change. An option worth considering is going to Seward and taking a Kenai Fjord boat ride, which gets very close to some remote glaciers and to an island where birds nest. However, Homer proved worth much more than the one night we spent there.

On the way out of Anchorage we stopped briefly at Potter's Marsh for an assortment of shorebirds and a few ducks and then saw some more ducks in small ponds on the way. After a while, everyone in the car voted for a no-more-stop policy, and we made it to our bed and breakfast outside Homer before too late in the afternoon. Andrea's parents were not used to B&Bs and not happy about being asked to remove their shoes to enter their rooms. I probably would have made the crew happier by booking a room at Land's End on Homer Spit. As it was, we just ate at their restaurant, which was quite good. Fresh enough, halibut can be pretty good, but it can't stand up to Silver, King or Sockeye salmon.

I got up early on the morning of July 25 and went up the steep hillside, finding some Golden-crowned Sparrows and a

female moose. As I started back down, I spotted a calf at the edge of the woods right near the path. Since moose kill more people than bears do, I opted to take a different path that got me to what I initially thought was a way-out-of-range Bullock's Oriole but was surely a White-winged Crossbill not seen well. Belly-flopping over some ferns and high grass, I eventually refound the path in the woods and got back in time for breakfast. Then, it was back to Homer Spit to meet up with Bay Excursions for the cruise I had reserved. There were about 12 people on board, and we all had a great 3-hour cruise.

Karl Stoltzfus has been making this trip for several years and has a great touch. After getting incredibly close-up looks at Sea Otters and sorting through some shorebirds, we set out toward a nesting colony of Aleutian Terns. Before long, Karl spotted an Aleutian in flight, and most on board got an identifiable view. But for those who didn't, not to worry. Karl spotted a tern on some debris out in Karchemak Bay, and we approached it very slowly. There was an adult Aleutian Tern standing next to a fledgling that had doubtless made its first flight from land. The adult flew off, but we got to admire the cinnamon-edged fledgling. And then the scene repeated itself with another adult and young Aleutian.

We headed toward a part of the bay with glacial moraine and were soon amongst both Marbled and Kittlitz's Murrelets. Floating there, we got an excellent opportunity to study the differences in plumage.

Aside from a mixed flock of scoter (mainly White-winged, but several Surf) things slowed down for a bit—until we approached Gull Island. There, we saw nests with young Glaucous-winged Gulls, some baby Common Murres, Horned and Tufted Puffins, nesting Pelagic Cormorants and nesting Red-faced. Again, we got to know them personally before we headed toward shore hoping for an early White-faced Storm-Petrel, but being disappointed by a false alarm (an Aleutian Tern that had been pattering.)

Andrea and her parents met me by the boat; we bought some crackers and delicious smoked salmon for lunch on the road, saw the Trumpeter Swan on Lake Beluga that Karl had mentioned to me—and several singing White-winged Crossbills, too.

Then, we headed out on the long drive back to Anchorage. Had we stayed another night, I could have checked for

Ancient Murrelet and White-faced Storm-Petrel from the spit (the other side from Karchemak Bay.)

We stayed at Anchorage and prepared to take an early train the next morning to Denali.

After we found the wallet with ID that Andrea's mother had accidentally packed in the checked luggage, we boarded the Alaska Railroad for the trip from Anchorage to Denali. Close to town there was a lot of construction and other disturbance, but once we got a ways off, the scenery was beautiful, even on a cloudy day. We were not long out of Anchorage, when I spotted a male Moose that was running away from the train. Another we spotted later was calmer, and most in the train car got to see it.

A bird atop a cedar looked suspiciously like a Northern Hawk-Owl, but I didn't spot it till we were almost past it. It may well have just been a hawk. We got much better views of Trumpeter Swans, usually in pairs and occasionally with a gray young. Just past the continental divide, Andrea and I were riding in the higher viewing area, and I found a Black Bear. Most people in that part of the car got to see it, but no one down below did. The guides the railroad provides are not wildlife spotters.

The wind was blowing fiercely when we arrived at our lodge in the afternoon. I walked across the street and down a path behind the Princess Lodge to the river and then came back along a road. Not too many birds, but I enjoyed close looks at Boreal Chickadees and Gray Jays.

On July 27, I got up early and took the lodge's shuttle to the Visitor Center. From there, I walked along the road and took the path that started at the railroad tracks and walked down to Horseshoe Bend Lake. Several Varied Thrushes showed themselves well, as did a Beaver. I walked through a patch of conifers to an opening and found a Bohemian Waxwing perched atop a 4-foot tree. It stayed there long enough for me to appreciate it from every angle and then flew off with a second of its kind.

I went back to the Visitor Center and met Andrea for the first shuttle ride to Savage River at 9 a.m. We didn't see much wildlife on the ride out, and clouds covered Mount McKinley completely. When we took the little side trail to the river bar, we found a family group of Willow Ptarmigan that let us take pictures from a only a few feet away. Other birds seen included Orange-crowned Warbler, American Tree Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow. On our

way back to the Visitor Center we stopped to admire the North Peak of Mount McKinley—the only time we saw any of the mountain.

On the morning of July 28, I got up extra early and took the shuttle to the Visitor Center in time to catch the 5:30 bus to Eielson Center, on which I had reserved a seat. The notion that the early bus gets to see the wildlife held fairly true. We had Moose before we even got past the worker housing—a collared female with 2 calves. We saw more Moose, groups of Caribou and Dall Sheep (I called them when I first saw white dots on a hillside) before I got out of the bus at Igloo Creek to look for Arctic Warbler. It took a bit longer than I expected, but I found a group of five hopping about and calling in a medium-sized willow.

A bus person had told me I would need to walk back 3 miles to mile 29 to be sure of being able to join Andrea and her folks on the 8 a.m. bus. Unfortunately, Igloo Creek was around 34.5 miles out, not 32. I walked back at a brisk pace slowing only for a Snowshoe Hare and some White-winged Crossbills. I was about to cross a bridge over a river around mile marker 30 when a bus driver pulled over and told me to watch out. Down in the river was a female Grizzly and two cubs. The driver said it was safe to continue along the road, although the next driver also stopped and told me I had to cross to the far side of the street—and that it would be better to wait for a bus to take me across.

I compromised and walked across the bridge on the far side and did not look down at the Grizzlies until I was following the road uphill from the river. The bears were quite unperturbed. After rounding a curve, I looked down at the river and saw a couple of people walking downstream along the same river the bears were walking upstream (or vice versa.) I yelled down “bears.” They heard me, but instead of leaving the river and going up to a nearby rest area, they just crossed to the other side of the river and proceeded on their way.

Not long after I walked by the rest stop, I met the bus with Andrea and her parents. Although the bus had already passed the campground I was supposed to walk past, there was a seat for me. Since the bus had to stop at the rest area, I had plenty of time to talk about the bears. We had barely left the rest area when someone spotted them and yelled out. Everyone on the bus got great views, although we had to pull away a bit early so that a bus could get between the

bears and those two people who had been in the river. They were still too close to the bears.

The rest of the drive out, we saw some more Caribou and Dall Sheep, as well as more Grizzlies. When we reached Polychrome, the driver said that a Gyrfalcon usually hung out on one of the rock formations. The driver didn't see it and was about to leave when I spotted the Gyr—and patiently got everyone onto it. As we got near Eielson, Andrea's father spotted a group of adult Long-tailed Jaegers. When I got excited about it, someone on the bus said to someone else, “It's just another bird.”

It was raining and foggy at Eielson, so we did not venture far. Some folks had just seen a Wolf—but I had to settle for the Wolf scat I'd seen the afternoon before.

After we reboarded and started back for the Visitor Center, Andrea spotted a Golden Eagle. Everyone on the bus enjoyed watching it fly right by us. I got off at Polychrome to hike a bit hoping for Rock Ptarmigan. No luck there, although it was exciting to find a fresh Grizzly print in the mud by a pond that held some Solitary Sandpipers. After a bit of climbing and blueberry-munching, I boarded another bus 90 minutes later that ended up getting the best Grizzly views. Right after we saw a sow with triplets quite close to the bus, we saw a lone bear just off the roadside. We could study its claws and teeth as it ran berry plants through its mouth to remove the fruit.

The next morning, we left by bus for Anchorage stopping at Talkeetna. Again, no view of Denali, but a good-sized group of Common Redpoll and an Olive-sided Flycatcher. And a very tasty scone. At Houston, Andrea and her folks got ice cream, and I saw a Western Wood-Pewee, strangely the first for the trip.

We got into Anchorage early enough for me to walk the sea path and look for ducks and shorebirds. I found a pretty good assortment of both—with the Hudsonian Godwits at the sea's edge taking best of show.

A friend was at Denali two weeks later—and Willow Ptarmigan were “everywhere,” forcing the bus to slow down as they crossed the road. She also got a view of all of McKinley. Each trip to the park is different, but they are all spectacular.

On the flight out of Anchorage, we were able to look down and see a few glaciers from a vantage point that really showed them to be frozen rivers. A fittingly pleasant end to an Alaska visit that worked out so well on many levels.

AOS Financial Statement

January 1, 2004–June 30, 2004
(Rounded to nearest dollar)

Balance on hand January 1, 2004	\$14,900
INCOME	
Dues	\$ 2,480
Meeting Registrations	2,960
Banquet	3,672
Sealab	924
FODIAS (DIBS)	1,342
CBA Dues	490
Interest Deposits	5
TOTAL	\$11,873
EXPENSES	
Lake Point State Lodge (banquet, hall rental, speaker's room)	\$1,016
Winter speaker's meals	26
Coastal Birding Association dues reimbursed	165
Dauphin Island Chamber of Commerce	350
Dauphin Island Sea Lab (spring meeting)	780
Seafood Galley (spring banquet)	2,200
Breakfast (reimburse Mike Wilson)	195
Spring speaker honorarium and travel	560
DIBS reimbursed donations	1,342
Donation to DIBS (Stowers memorial)	200
Donation B'ham Audubon—Birdathon	*5,000
Door Prizes	121
Postage	444
Supplies (cash box, name tag holders, card stock)	72
Breeding Bird Atlas Project	2,807
Printers & Stationers (AL Birdlife)	793
Herald Printing	162
Commercial Printing (field cards)	234
<i>Yellowhammer</i> Printing (Photographics, Inc.)	1,047
High Speed Solutions (AOS Website)	113
Phone bill (RBA line)	351
TOTAL	\$17,978
Balance on hand June 30, 2004	\$8,795

*Matched with additional \$15,000 and donated to DIBS.

Attention Listers!

THE YELLOWHAMMER will report in the Summer issue any list of interest, whether it is ABA Life, World, Alabama or other state(s), county, yard, year, or anything else you wish to submit. The deadline is June 10, 2005. Participation was a little off last year, and the no-account editor forgot this year, but perhaps we can get this going and keep it going. Each of you probably has at least one list of some sort; share it with the rest of us.

"On the Road Again" Articles

FOR SOME TIME I have not needed any "On the Road Again" articles, as we had several in reserve. The cupboard is bare. Please send me your OTR stories, or the next one may be my own, which I'm really interested in publishing. Electronic versions are much easier for me to copy and paste, but send them by carrier pigeon if you have one. The addresses are on the back cover.

Electronic Yellowhammer?

IT COSTS WELL OVER A DOLLAR AND A HALF to print and mail *The Yellowhammer*. We are going to try, on a totally voluntary basis, to deliver *The Yellowhammer* via the internet. If you would like to receive your *Yellowhammer* via the internet, as a pdf file, please email the editor at rreed@psc.state.al.us.

Important Dates

SECOND FRIDAY—October 8-10, 2004

Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 28-30, 2005

Winter Meeting, Guntersville, Alabama

THIRD FRIDAY—April 15-17, 2005

Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island, Alabama

SECOND SATURDAY—May 14, 2005

North American Migration Count

I N M E M O R I A M

Virginia P. Golden

THE AOS RECENTLY LOST a dedicated, loyal and active member, Virginia P. Golden. Virginia truly loved Dauphin Island and the winged wonders of the spring migration—so much that she visited every April since 1981 to enjoy the spectacle and welcome Mother Nature’s bounty. Her joy, smile, and enthusiasm were infectious to those around her. We will miss the fellowship and friendship she bestowed upon us. May God’s peace and grace surround her husband Emmel and her family. Let’s give thanks for having the opportunity to bird with her and may her presence always be felt in every wing beat. —*Eugenia Carey*

VIRGINIA WAS ONE OF THE FIRST to welcome me to AOS. She did it with a smile the first day, and she never stopped smiling. Every time I saw her, it was like picking up with an old friend. I always looked for her at the meetings because she invariably offered me a word of encouragement. Virginia was always willing to help with any chore. When she was around, nothing was a chore, but simply a time of visiting with an old and comfortable friend.

—*Sharon Hudgins*

Gordon Lee Hight, Jr.

BIRDER’S IN ALABAMA, GEORGIA and elsewhere suffered a loss on August 3, 2004, that was not unlike an extinction. Gordon Hight passed away at his home in Rome, Georgia. He was a one-of-a-kind. He cannot be replaced. Gordon was 86 at the time of his death. He had not been well for a year or longer and suffered much over the past few months.

Gordon did well in business for most of his life. At the time of his death he was President of Simpson’s Grocery Company, one of Rome’s oldest family-owned businesses. Those of you who were close to Gordon will probably remember hearing him tell of an early business venture that was not at all successful. Seems he was in India and had the chance to purchase a flock of talking parrots. They were cheap and he

anticipated a large profit when he sold them to his friends and associates. The parrots apparently became deaf and dumb overnight and nobody was interested. Gordon learned later that he had bought the parrots from a ventriloquist.

When America became involved in World War II, Gordon left school and joined the army. He earned his pilot wings at Craig Field in Selma, Alabama, and flew combat missions in both the B-25 and C-47 in the China and India Theater of operation. He flew numerous combat missions over the Himalayas and earned the nickname of “Hump Happy Hight.” He always regretted that he didn’t have more time to study the birds of that part of the world. After the war Gordon returned to Rome to work in the family business.

Gordon was a long-time member of the Alabama Ornithological Society and was friends with Blanche Dean and Dr. Tom Imhof. He and Imhof exchanged notes on banding Chimney Swifts. In 1953 Gordon banded 19,000 Chimney Swifts and was written up in *Life* magazine. He was a board member of the Nature Conservancy and a Life Member of the Georgia Ornithological Society, and he was instrumental in starting the Rome Audubon Society.

Gordon took great pleasure in sharing his good fortune with others. It was not unusual for him to buy a case of binoculars and give them to a school or group where young people could get good looks at the birds he so enjoyed. I don’t recall that he ever turned down a request from AOS and other organizations for a donation for a good cause.

Gordon enjoyed sharing with his friends also. When he discovered a new bird book he usually bought 2 or 3 copies. One for himself and one for whomever else he might be thinking of at the moment. Before coming to Dauphin Island for an AOS meeting he would stop by the grocery company and pick up a case or two of bottled water and a good supply of crackers to share with anybody who was hungry or thirsty. Some of you with a bit stronger thirst I’m sure will recall that Gordon was the Budweiser distributor for Rome and the surrounding area.

I’ll miss Gordon. I’ll miss driving him on birding trips on Dauphin Island and other places. I’ll miss having him call to tell me about a bird he had seen and before hanging up say, “by the way, I’ve just mailed you a copy of a new book on warblers.” I’ll miss the water and crackers and parrot stories. But most of all I’ll miss Gordon because he was a good and true friend. A one of a kind. —*Tommy Pratt*

AOS FALL MEETING 2004

Meet the Speaker: Jon Dunn Introduces His Saturday Presentation on Sparrows

JON DUNN is a native Californian, although he did live for eight years in southwest Ohio in the Dayton area. He has had a near lifelong interest in birds. He co-authored with Kimball Garrett *Birds of Southern California, Status and Distribution* (1981) and *Warblers* (1997). He was Chief Consultant on the four editions of the *National Geographic's Birds of North America* and has been involved as narrator and/or writer for the *Large and Small Gulls of North America* and *Hummingbirds of North America* videos. He is a member of *The Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union* (often referred to as the *AOU Check-list Committee*) and a member of the *California Bird Records Committee*.



SPARROWS, ALONG WITH *EMPIDONAX* FLYCATCHERS, fall warblers and—God help us all—gulls, have long been viewed as one of the most difficult groups of birds to learn. They perhaps typify what many would call the classic LBJ (Little Brown Job). Yet, they intrigue us. Kenn Kaufman took perhaps the best approach in his *Advanced Birding* guide where he advised that to really learn sparrows you needed to learn the different genera, or each micro group within the larger family as a whole.

Apart from structural features, behavior is one of the main clues. Some species are gregarious in migration while others are solitary. Some, like birds in the genus *Spizella* (e.g. Chipping), or *Zonotrichia* (e.g. White-throated), are cooperative in forage in the open while others, like those in *Aimophila* (e.g. Bachman's), or *Ammodramus* (e.g. Henslow's and Grasshopper) are notoriously difficult to see when not singing on breeding territory. Indeed, to see them well in the winter, one has to almost plan a military operation requiring many "troops."

Behavioral clues are not only useful for locating sparrows but also in identifying them, i.e. if your suspected Henslow's Sparrow is perched in the open on a barbed wire fence for five minutes, perhaps it's time to rethink your identification.

Some groups respond well to pishing, while others seem to be utterly oblivious to our antics, sort of crushing them.

Not everything about sparrows is easy, even taking into account behavior. There is considerable geographic variation within many species, and species limits within a few (e.g. Fox Sparrow) are likely to be revised, or put another way, expanded (i.e. more splits). Thus it is important for all serious bird students to keep good records of the different races they have seen, as they become separate species as our knowledge increases.

Early October is a time when many sparrows are just beginning to arrive; indeed October is *the* sparrow month over much of North America, south of the northernmost states and provinces. While the peak in Alabama for most species falls later in the month, we should still see a nice variety on our field trips, possibly even something rare like a Lark or Clay-colored Sparrow. It will be a time when flycatchers and most warblers are declining, so it's time to learn the skulking LBJs because that's what's ahead for later in the month and on into the winter.

So sparrows represent a real but doable challenge. There are many species that occur in North America, many of which can be found in Alabama, especially during migration and in the winter. The slide show on Saturday evening will cover the sparrows that occur in eastern North America, including vagrants, but will emphasize Alabama. As indicated, there will be an emphasis on behavioral clues in addition to the visual identification marks for each species. Also important is learning the distribution for each species and where and especially when it is likely to occur.

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Winter 2004	November 15, 2004
Spring 2005	February 12, 2005
Summer 2005	June 10, 2005

AOS FALL MEETING 2004

Dauphin Island, Alabama, October 8-10, 2004

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8

- 3:00 p.m. Sea Lab Registration at the Chamber Hall
- 6:00 p.m. Check-in begins at the Chamber Hall
- 6:00 p.m. Pot Luck snack and open bar
(Bring your favorite snack or dessert)
- 7:00 p.m. Member slide show
- 8:30 p.m. Board meeting—Chamber Hall

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9

- 6:00 a.m. Complimentary Danish and coffee at the Sea Lab
- 7:00 a.m. Field trips—Meet at Sea Lab parking lot
- 6:00 p.m. Open bar social
- 6:45 p.m. Seafood banquet
- 8:00 p.m. Program—Jon Dunn

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10

- 6:00 a.m. Complimentary Danish and coffee at the Sea Lab
- 7:00 a.m. Field trips—Meet at Sea Lab parking lot
- 12:00 p.m. Compilation—Shell Mounds

ACCOMMODATIONS AND INFORMATION

Sea Lab—Double occupancy rooms with bath on hall available for 42. (First come, first served.) Bring your own linens, blankets, and towels. Available at 5 p.m. Friday, October 8. See registration form.

Motels—Gulf Breeze and Harbor Lights Motel: (800) 286-0296 and Bayside Motel & Apts.: (251) 861-4994

Rentals—Boardwalk Realty, Inc: (877) 861-3992; Dauphin Island Real Estate: (888) 707-6444; Tyson Real Estate: (251) 861-8312; Pickett Real Estate: (800) 861-3646; Island Realty Corp.: (877) 219-7392; Angel Realty: (888) 473-5534

Websites—www.gulfinfo.com and www.dauphinisland.cc

FRIDAY NIGHT POT LUCK

Don't forget to bring your favorite appetizer, snack, dessert, etc. for the social hour before the program at 7:00 p.m. on Friday night.

AOS FALL MEETING 2004 REGISTRATION FORM

Complete and return to:

Shelly Ducharme, Treasurer, 1026 DeKalb Street, Auburn, AL 36830

e-mail: mducharme@mindspring.com

Please make checks payable to AOS and remit by October 3, 2004. No refunds after October 3, 2004

Name(s) _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 E-mail Address _____

AOS DUES Student: \$5 • Individual: \$15 • Family: \$20 • Sustaining: \$20 • Life (individual): \$200 • Life (family): \$300

SEA LAB
<input type="checkbox"/> Friday Night How Many _____ Amount \$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Night How Many _____ Amount \$ _____

Registration @ \$10 per person	\$
Banquet @ \$19 per person	\$
Sea Lab @ \$15 per person per night	\$
AOS 2005 Dues	\$
Coastal Birding Association 2005 Dues (\$5)	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

THE YELLOWHAMMER

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ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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