

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 24, NO. 1 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPRING 2004

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

FOUNDED 1952



4

BACKYARD BIRDING
CHRISTMAS UNDER
THE AZALEAS

by Tom Siegwald

5

WINTER MEETING REPORT

by Gregory J. Harber

IN THIS ISSUE

7-12

SPECIAL 6-PAGE SUPPLEMENT

ALABAMA BREEDING
BIRD ATLAS

by Rick West

13

FINDING EASTERN
SCREECH OWLS

by Larry Gardella

14

2004 SPRING MEETING
MEET THE SPEAKER:
DR. DAVID M. BIRD

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

OFFICERS, DIRECTORS, AND COMMITTEES

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT.....Colonel Bob Reed
 VICE PRESIDENT.....Stan Hamilton
 TREASURER.....Shelly Ducharme
 SECRETARY.....Karen Wilson
 IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT.....Allen Tubbs
 CURATOR.....Dan Holliman

REGIONAL DIRECTORS

TENNESSEE VALLEY.....Floyd Sherrod
 MOUNTAIN REGION.....Alison Glascock
 COASTAL PLAINTommy Pratt
 GULF COASTMike Wilson, John Porter
 NORTHWEST FLORIDADonald Ware

EDITORS

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE.....Tom Haggerty
 YELLOWHAMMER.....Bob Reed
 ALABAMA BIRD RECORDS.....Greg Jackson
 NORTHWEST FLORIDA BIRD RECORDS.....
Bob Duncan

COMMITTEES

CONSERVATION

Bob Reid

MEMBERSHIP

Greg Harber

Tommy Pratt, Floyd Sherrod,
 Mike Wilson, Gordon Hight

SLIDES

Tom Haggerty

Walt Burch

BIRD RECORDS

Larry Gardella, *Secretary*

Dwight Cooley, Bob Duncan, Barry Flemming,
 Greg Jackson, Steve McConnell, Shawn Reed

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Allen Tubbs and Lauren Dunning

NOMINATING

Karen Wilson

Sharon Hudgins

ONLINE SERVICES

Chris Price

Greg Jackson, Suzanne Owens,
 Steve McConnell

PUBLICATIONS

Annabel Markle

Bob Reed, Tom Haggerty, Robin McDonald

CENSUSING

Greg Jackson

Bob Duncan, Sharon Hudgins, Steve McConnell,
 Sue Moske, Shawn Reed, Bob Reid, Eric Soehren,
 Bill Summerour, Michael Roedel

ALABAMA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

Rick West

EDUCATION

Shirley and Frank Farrell

Nancy McGinty, Carol Alford, Stan and Dana Hamilton

FIELD TRIPS

Stan Hamilton

Howard Horne, Keith Kamper

RESEARCH

Paul Kittle

Geoff Hill, Bill Summerour, Greg Jackson

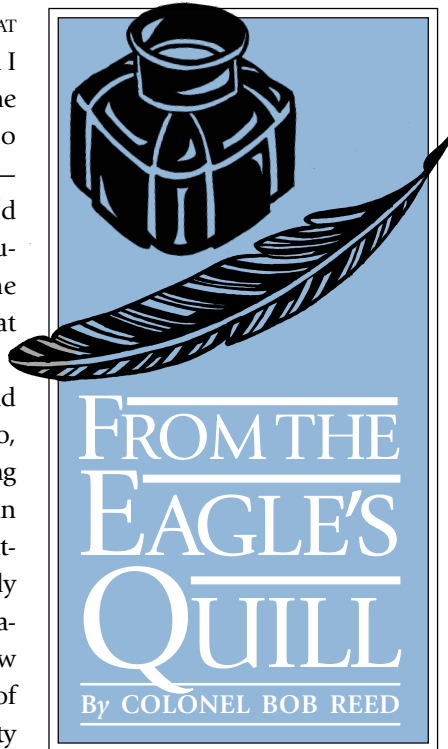
MEETINGS

Sharon Hudgins

Mike Wilson, John Porter, Linda Reynolds, Laurie Bailey,
 Joan Siegwald, Tom Siegwald

WE ARE IN FOR A REAL TREAT AT the April meeting. When I was talking to Pete Dunne about coming down to speak to us—he's coming April 2005—he suggested David Bird. Pete said he'd heard Dr. Bird give this particular humorous talk twice, and both times he laughed until his sides hurt. Is that what is meant by sidesplitting humor?

We have upcoming at least two, and possibly three, depending on what you do, opportunities to provide data for ongoing studies. The NAMC, the North American Migration Count, is always the second Saturday in May. The AOS board strongly supports this annual snapshot of migration. In the past some of us have had a few reservations about this project because of the date. By the NAMC date, the majority of migration is past in Alabama. The majority, but not all. Every year, in central Alabama we have a good many shorebirds, if there is any standing water. Pat and I watched a Kentucky Warbler foraging through an apple tree one year. The very next year I was privileged to see a Kirtland's Warbler just south of Montgomery. (No, it wasn't accepted as a state record because of a lack of corroborating evidence such as other viewers or photos, and my failure to note certain characteristics, but I still saw it.) The NAMC has to be *some* day, and if it were earlier, migration wouldn't even be happening in northern North America. Our participation has



been down in recent years, and the lack of party hours is endangering the credibility of our data. I strongly encourage you to contact your local NAMC coordinator (available on the AOS website) and get an assignment. As an added bonus, you can be alert for evidence of breeding and get a jump on your Breeding Bird Atlas reports.

The Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) project is your second opportunity. Rick West in commanding this project in a marvelous way, and I encourage every one of you to do something toward this atlas, so that you can say in years to come, "I helped on that book." Rick has prepared an excellent section of this *Yellowhammer* on the BBA project. This project, more than any other, is one where everyone, regardless of their birding expertise, can make real contributions. Don't let the opportunity pass you by.

Finally, there are the Breeding Bird Surveys, marshaled by Bob Reid. These are long-term projects which have a long-term impact on our bird knowledge. If you are not involved, I encourage you to talk to Bob about adopting a route. Pat and I have done two for several years, and feel a real ownership for them. You will too if you decide to participate.

All of these opportunities can be fun. After all, you are outdoors looking at birds and offering real service to our understanding of them. You can't beat that. You will be richer for doing at least one of them.



Christmas under the Azaleas



VER THE LAST SIX MONTHS WE have noticed a Cooper's Hawk in the area that is attracted to the birds attracted to our feeders. We have seen him and evidence of some kills left in the yard on a number of occasions.

On the day after Christmas, Joan and I were in the backyard when suddenly there was an explosion of small birds out of the azalea hedge. We looked at each other and said, "the Hawk!"

We checked the trees, the hedges and sky, with no luck. Finally Joan noticed some movement in the neighbor's yard, and sure enough, sitting atop a low brush pile was the Cooper's Hawk. Nice opportunity to study this bird closely, we thought. However there was the matter of the old azalea hedge between us and the bird and, maneuver as we would, we couldn't get a clear view of him.

Finally, out of frustration, I got down on the ground and crawled under the bushes up to the fence with my binoculars where I had a perfect view. The bird just sat there, about 20 feet from me, looking around, seemingly wondering what to do next since it obviously hadn't scored a kill. The bird sat; I studied. Ten minutes pass—I'm still flat on the ground under the bushes and the bird is still on the brush pile. Another five minutes pass—same situation. You can only study a bird for so long in that position so I tried to shift a bit, moving my elbows in the leaf litter. The bird suddenly turns around and looks right at me. I stop and stare right back at him. Interesting. I reach down and ruffle my fingers through the leaf litter a bit more. The bird hops off the brush pile and hops closer, stopping maybe 10 feet from me and stares. I ruffle the litter. The bird hops closer. Getting even more interesting. I ruffle again and the bird hops right up to the fence not 18 inches from me, looking me right in the eye. Hmm. What now?

At this range, who needs binoculars? Looking over the bird I noticed one of its rear toes seems swollen and some-



what bloody, obviously a recent injury.

Ok...the bird hadn't made a kill, it's injured and it's sitting on the ground looking at me. What to do?

Well, how about feeding it something? I asked Joan, who is watching this, to go into the house and get me something to feed the hawk. This leads to an interesting discussion of what to get a hawk for a snack? Aha! How about a piece of the Christmas ham?

Dumb idea, I know. But the last gerbil had died many years ago and Joan would get upset if I tried to feed one of the cats to the bird. (Wishful thinking on my part!) So, Joan shortly returns and hands me a slice of ham. I'm still on the ground under the bushes and the hawk is on the ground

on the other side of the fence, still looking right at me. I rip off a piece of ham, and carefully, between finger and thumb, stick it through the fence and let it dangle.

Hawk just stares. I sort of wiggle it a bit. The hawk takes one hop in my direction, sits back on its tail, raises both feet and grabs the ham—and one of my fingers—in its talons.

Being no fool—although at this point I'm sure there are those who would disagree—I immediately yelped, let go of the ham and withdrew my hand! (Robert Frost was right, good fences do make good neighbors.) Meanwhile the bird takes two hops back, settles in and examines the piece of ham in its talon. It looks at the ham...then it looks at me...it looks at the ham again...it bends down and starts to tear the ham apart with its bill and starts eating! Takes maybe three or four bites and there is nothing left but shreds, apparently not worth fooling with. It looks up at me, hops back over to the fence and stares right at me.

I may be a slow learner, but there is no way I'm sticking my fingers through that fence again. I was bleeding a bit and had gotten the message. But still the bird stares at me. I tear off another piece of ham and this time just sort of hang it on the fence and pull my hand back fast. The bird looks at the

ham, takes a hop closer and grabs this piece in its bill, hops back two hops and starts to eat. Bird finishes, looks at me, hops back to the fence and stares!

The procedure repeats itself two more times. Finally I ran out of ham and was getting stiff and cold so I withdrew. Bird finishes its last tidbit and hops back to the fence where I had been and stares again.

Deciding that we have interfered with Mother Nature enough at this point and beginning to have second thoughts about how a hawk's digestive system might react to ham,

Joan and I decided to go into the house for coffee and a band-aid for my finger.

Ten minutes later I go back out into the yard and sure enough the hawk is still sitting there, waiting. I go back in and maybe 15 minutes later look out the kitchen window; the hawk had flown into our yard and was sitting on the picnic table. Something soon caught its attention and it flew off. Elapsed time, about an hour and a half.

By the way, the hawk returned the next day and perched in the oak tree. I went inside!

A O S W I N T E R M E E T I N G 2 0 0 4

Winter Meeting Report

By GREGORY J. HARBER



THE WEATHER REPORT FOR THE WEEKEND CALLED FOR rain and cloudy skies on Saturday and Sunday, but as I busied myself about the lab on Friday morning all I could think about was getting out of town and down to Eufaula. As Ron, Mary, Edith and I headed out US 280 later that afternoon the tensions of the morning eased away.

We arrived at Lake Point Resort State Park in time to register and eat before making our way to the banquet hall for the evening activities. The gathering was small by spring or even fall meeting standards but it was still wonderful to see many familiar faces, and new ones too...especially those belonging to our new members. Rick West informed us that the Breeding Bird Atlas project was making great progress but there is still much to be done. He also painstakingly posted distribution maps for each species documented thus far in the atlas, illustrating its range throughout the state. Thanks Rick! As is my custom, I took the opportunity during the Members' Favorite Slides portion of the program to share some of my favorite photos with music accompaniment.

The Saturday morning field trips began under cloudy but dry conditions. Dick Reynolds led one party to the Kennedy Unit of the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge while his wife Linda led our group to the Houston Unit. Almost immediately we encountered a variety of ducks on the first pond. A plethora of Cedar Waxwings careened through the bare tree branches and several sparrow species flitted near the field

edges. A small flock of Greater White-fronted Geese sauntered around the ground on the far side of the impoundment. Bringing up the end of the line as the caravan continued around the wildlife drive, we paused to enjoy a resplendently attired Fox Sparrow.

Arriving at a large body of water near the river the group strolled the dikes, taking in the sight of the many ducks: Hooded Mergansers, Buffleheads, Pintails, Goldeneyes, Gadwalls, and Wood Ducks. One was prettier than the next. A Virginia Rail scuttled out of the way and a Sedge Wren peeked and ducked through the grasses. Surely one of the highlights of the morning was watching an adult Bald Eagle feed, its white head gleaming in the midday light. Three Anhingas soared high overhead, their bodies like exaggerated iron crosses against the sky.

After lunch the entire contingent reconvened at the Bradley Unit on the Georgia side of the refuge. A morning's worth of hunting made the ducks extremely skittish, and rightfully so! The wooded swamps provided opportunities to observe a variety of small woodland species, nervous Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, for example. As the day wore on the skies grew heavier and rain fell late in the afternoon, but not before a lucky few saw and heard four groups of Sandhill Cranes, bugling as they flew.

Giff Beaton's Saturday evening program about warblers was surely one of the most enjoyable and informative programs I have heard in a while. Giff almost had me believing

I could readily identify confusing fall warblers with the greatest of ease!

The early morning rains passed in time for the field trips to get off to a relatively dry start but my group opted to walk through the Davis-Clark Unit near the park. I'm glad we did; it felt wonderful to pace through the fields and follow the sparrows as they flew on ahead. A Lincoln's Sparrow was a treat, no doubt, but the surprise of the morning was a Prairie Warbler in amongst the tall stalks of grass. After turning the Jeep homeward bound the rains finally came with a steady cadence, but by then my memories of this easy-paced weekend were safely stowed away.

*Winter 2004 AOS Compilation List
Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge,
Eufaula, Alabama, January 23-25, 2004*

WEEKEND HIGHLIGHTS WERE THE SANDHILL CRANES AND A Kreider's Red-tailed Hawk. This list follows the new American Ornithological Union taxonomic order.

Greater White-fronted
Goose
Canada Goose
Wood Duck
Gadwall
American Wigeon
American Black Duck
Mallard
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Wild Turkey
Northern Bobwhite

Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
Double-crested Cormorant
Anhinga
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Cattle Egret
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
American Kestrel
Merlin
King Rail
Virginia Rail
Common Moorhen
American Coot
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
Common Ground-Dove
Great Horned Owl
Barred Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
Eastern Phoebe
Loggerhead Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Brown-headed Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Carolina Wren
House Wren
Winter Wren
Sedge Wren
Marsh Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet

Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Eastern Bluebird
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
Brown Thrasher
European Starling
American Pipit
Cedar Waxwing
Orange-crowned Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Pine Warbler
Prairie Warbler
Palm Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Eastern Towhee
Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Fox Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird
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 **bold-faced**, 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.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO *THE YELLOWHAMMER*

ALABAMA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

By RICK WEST, *State Coordinator, Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas Project*

Thanks and Double Hurray!

WE'VE HAD A REALLY GREAT SECOND YEAR to go with the wonderful start we had in 2002. Participation has remained strong at over 100 contributors, all of whom, I hope, have had a good time birding. We added 27,000 new records to the project bringing the total to almost 78,000 records—and that is after eliminating all the duplicates and upgrades that don't add to the number of species recorded in a Block. If we continue at 25,000 per year we will have 150,000 records and a thorough Atlas Project. We can do it!



Our quality has increased from 10% Confirmed breeding reports to 15% Confirmed breeding at the end of 2003, and this will increase each year.

Most important is our progress on the 628 core CE (Central East) Blocks targeted to produce a statistical sample (see Table, page 11). For good results we should get as many species as possible in each CE Block. We have made very good progress, but it is a big challenge to find several more species after you have found all the common ones in a Block.

Many, many thanks to all who have helped. —*Rick West*

Three new aids for the field. Please use them.

FREE Admission and Camping!

The State Parks Director has agreed to allow atlasers to enter parks without paying an entrance fee. They will also allow free camping if space is available. Your field card is your entry permit, but you will probably have to remind them of the agreement. It is valid June 2003–June 2006, but they may have forgotten. Just ask them to please check their files. We should make it a point to use this privilege, but it is only for atlasers—in the parks and as a home base for surrounding areas. Thanks to Carl Scardina for arranging this.

NOT a "get out of jail free."

The State DCNR has provided a letter of introduction for Atlasers to landowners for approaching them to ask permis-

sion to go on their property. It is signed by Mark Sasser, Nongame Wildlife Coordinator, by me, and by the Regional Coordinator. You can get this useful letter from your Regional Coordinator once you convince him you will not use it after the fact if you are arrested for trespassing! Thanks, Mark, for arranging this.

Dashboard Placard

Quick, easy explanation. Many of us have used the dashboard placard that says Official Vehicle and refers to the Breeding Bird Atlas. It has been reworded to say WILDLIFE SURVEY FOR BIRDS. This short phrase saves you a lot of breath, because people understand from it what you are doing, whereas they really do not relate to "Atlas." The print is big enough to read without reading glasses. When I am out of the car for a while, I place the placard under my windshield wiper where it will be easy to see and read.

Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas Receives AWRC Breeding Bird Records

THE ALABAMA WILDLIFE REHABILITATION CENTER (AWRC) at Oak Mountain State Park near Birmingham has generously provided access to their records to the Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) project. Each year, AWRC receives injured and orphaned birds (and other wildlife) from Alabama and the surrounding states. In addition to providing medical treatment to the injured and sustenance to the abandoned, AWRC maintains records for each creature with the goal of reuniting it with its family group when it is strong enough to live on its own.

These records are a valuable resource for the BBA project because they include the location where the bird was found, the date, stage of development (nestling, fledgling, adult, etc.), and the name of the person who found the bird. Each record represents confirmed breeding of that particular species for the Block where the nestling or fledgling was originally found.

Recently, we visited the AWRC to compile these records for the BBA project. Stan and I examined 625 baby raptor cases and Rick West looked at other case histories from the 2002 and 2003 "baby bird" seasons. After sorting out brood mates, birds for which the exact nesting location could not be determined, and multiple reports from the same Atlas Block, we obtained 251 unique confirmed breeding records. These records included 29 species of songbirds and 11 species of raptors. The distribution extended to 61 quadrangles in 27 different counties. As time permits, the remaining AWRC records and those that will accumulate through 2006 will be examined and compiled.

The AWRC records provided breeding confirmation for many difficult-to-confirm-species including Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Woodcock, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Pileated Woodpecker. In addition, several records were obtained for Great Horned, Barred, Barn and Screech Owls. Hawk species confirmed included Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, Cooper's, Sharp-shinned and Broad-winged. A Mississippi Kite and Turkey Vultures were also confirmed. Many of the records came from urban areas where we don't normally go birding.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Anne Miller and the AWRC staff for their generous hospitality and for granting

the BBA project access to this valuable cache of breeding bird data. For more information regarding the Alabama Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, visit their website at <http://www.awrc.org/>. —Dana Hamilton

Really Useful New Reports for the Atlas Project

THANKS TO OUR WEBMASTER, CHRIS PRICE, OUR WEBSITE <http://www.bham.net/aos/bba/index.htm> provides a great way to get information of what has been seen where. Click on the results map, and then on a colored region to view our progress on a color-coded map. Click on any Quadrangle to see the results of each Block. From that page, click on Species to see just what has been reported in each Block.

Please be sure to contact me (rickwest@aol.com) or one of the regional coordinators to identify the USGS Quad and Block where you live. Be sure to click on your home Block to see how it is doing. Be sure to notice the closest red Block to your home; that is where we need help the most. Be sure to notice blank Blocks near your home; that is where you can most easily help.

Emailed Maps and Field Cards—We can now email maps and field cards. This is a way to help you decide if you want to get started on an area without costing any postage, paper or delay. They come as PDF files which are easy to download and print.

Maps—Maps are what the Atlas Project is all about. We have distribution maps for all the species showing all the records. They give a good indication of the breeding distributions of over 150 species. Most importantly, they suggest where to look for other breeding pairs to extend ranges and fill in gaps. Twelve sets of these maps are available; each coordinator has a set. They were on display at the winter meeting and selected maps will be displayed at the spring meeting. Also the notebook with a full set of maps will be available for examination at the meetings. See the Great Horned Owl map on page 10 as an example.

County Lists from the Atlas—We produced a set of County Lists of Breeding Birds to assist research relating bird distribution with occurrence of West Nile Virus. We encourage you to ask for these county lists if you are interested in

finding additional breeding species that may be breeding in your county, or confirming that they are breeding. This will help the Atlas Project.

The Joys of Night Birding

RICK ASKED FOR A SHORT ARTICLE ON NIGHT BIRDING, SO I'LL omit my Great Horned Owl thrills such as a pair in the tops of two pines, hooting and bowing with tails cocked up, framed in a gorgeous sunset of magenta, pink, red and purple, with a crescent moon directly above them, a bright evening star below the moon. . . .

The thrilling adventures of my recently-found passion for night birding continue! These last two years of Atlasing for owls, woodcocks, nightjars and nighthawks have opened up a whole new world of birding for me. Previously, my birding experiences were limited to the hours of 5 a.m. to 12 noon and, most certainly, any birding after dark was for those "young people." How my thinking has changed!

I ventured out with American Woodcock and Great Horned Owl as my target birds the other evening. Arriving at dusk at a lovely spot on a lonely dirt road in central Baldwin County, a field with dry weeds and a little brush, pines close by, I open my windows in preparation to playing the Great Horned Owl tape—and WOW! Immediately I hear the *peenting* of two woodcocks! Forget owls for this spot!

In the dusk/early evening moonlight I see the silhouettes of the little darlings. First they loudly *peent* then spiral upward to a height of 200 or more feet, their wings making a "whirring" sound. This being my first experience with displaying woodcocks, I am astonished as they "fall" from the sky, making chips and chirps! Goose-bump time; heart flying out of my chest. . . .

A mile up the road I get close and personal with a very vocal pair of Great Horned Owls. How can it get any better than this?

After a series of "no luck" stops, but adrenalin still at a peak, I venture several miles north to a dirt road that crosses Hollinger Creek. Perfect habitat for Barred Owl. I am not disappointed. Two minutes of tape playing, a silent three-minute wait, then in the canopy directly over my head there suddenly explodes a cacophony of sound: enraged Barred Owls! For ten minutes they carry on! Apparently they then

decide the intruder has been vanquished, as romance blossoms! Serious romance, if you get my drift here, folks! And all the while I'm watching them in the bright moonlight with my binocs! They silently depart, one flying closely behind the other. So lovely, so sweet.

At such times I really, truly believe all is right with the world.—*Claire Krusko*

A Typical Field Card

ATLASERS DON'T USUALLY SEE FIELD CARDS OF OTHER ATLASERS, so some may not know how they are doing.

A typical, well-done Atlas field card has:

- Results of 2 mornings of birding. One trip just does not do justice to an area.
- About 50 species reported. Blocks in the south usually have to struggle for 50, while those in the north easily reach 60 species.
- About 15 species Confirmed. The number of Confirmed species is remarkably consistent at about 1 to 4 species per hour.
- About 15 species at the Probable level. Many of these are pairs; the T code is used by those who make more than one trip.
- At least one very brief note: vulture roost, landowner's name, second-hand data, location of a good bird, etc.

A very few, usually less-experienced, Atlasers will confirm many species compared to the rest of us. I counsel them to remember that the traditional breeding evidence is nest, eggs, or a short-tailed young not capable of sustained flight. Atlasers also use dependent behavior for confirming breeding, but we should not stray too far from the traditional definition of confirmed breeding.

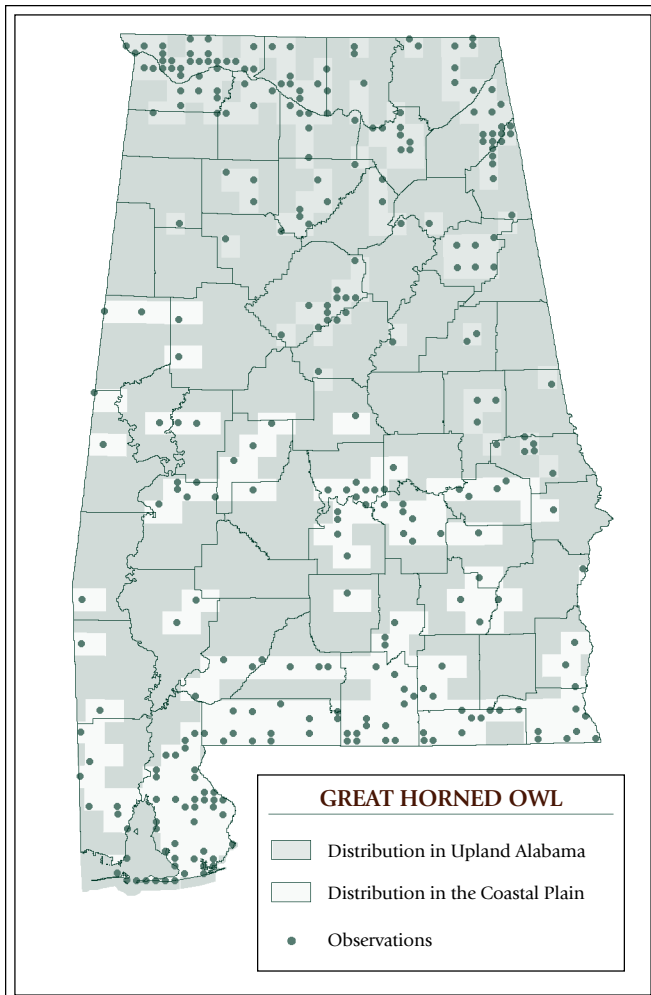
A few others will have only two or three species confirmed after a morning's outing. I counsel them to look a little harder—for birds carrying food or nest material, or young following an adult and accepting food. If you are doing point counts or counting numbers, it is more difficult to concentrate on confirming breeding, and you should not expect to confirm as many species.

It is necessary for us all to share the same criteria in confirming breeding so that the data will merge satisfactory and not show hot spots from observer differences.

Distribution of Great Horned Owls in Alabama

GREAT HORNED OWLS ARE ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT BREEDING birds to find. It often does not hoot back at you if you try to call one up, and is infrequently seen in the daytime. The accompanying Distribution Map shows our progress so far. It certainly appears to be distributed throughout the state; so far we have reports of it from 59 of the 67 counties. If you hear one in any part of the state with no dot on the map, we would like to hear from you. We need date, location, and what you saw or heard. December, and April through June are the best times to hear one.

We have found it in 116 of the 628 targeted Blocks (18%), which suggests it will be reported in only about half



of the targeted Blocks by the project's end. This would be twice as many as found in the Tennessee project, but far short of the 80 or 90% of the Blocks where it probably occurs. You can help in two ways—please report the ones you hear from your bedroom window if you have not already done so. Also I strongly recommend your starting as many of your birding trips as possible in time to arrive in the field as dawn first begins to break. The first few minutes before dawn as the chorus of birds begins is surely the most rewarding time to be afield. It is also a good time to hear Great Horned Owls—which you will surely report to the Atlas Project!

"Blocks," "Quads," and "Double Quads"

THE GREAT HORNED OWL DISTRIBUTION MAP ILLUSTRATES THE use of "Quads," "Double Quads" and "Blocks" in the Atlas Project.

Quads—The US Geological Service topographic quadrangles (Quads), which cover 60 square miles, are a fundamental **mapping unit** in our project. If a Great Horned Owl is breeding anywhere in a Quad, we show that Quad as dark (pale blue) on the distribution map. We try to get reports

from all 878 Blocks that cover Alabama, but know 878 Quads are too many to cover thoroughly during the 5-year project.

Double Quads—On the Coastal Plain, where the bird composition does not change much from Quad to Quad, we pair up the Quads as “Double Quads.” If a Horned Owl is found anywhere within the 120 square miles of a Double Quad, we show that area as light (pale yellow). That reduces the number of mapping units by 233, and allows us to focus more on the northern and eastern part of the state, where diversity is greater, and the birding more varied. We want to find as many species as possible in each of these 645 mapping units, so that we have an accurate and complete distribution map for each species.

Blocks—We make the Project easier and more useful for conservation by surveying smaller units (Blocks) of only 10 square miles. A Block is one-sixth of a Quad. Alabama has 5100 Blocks—too many to cover well. So we target for surveying thoroughly only one Block in each mapping unit (Quad or Double Quad). The dots on the map show the locations of the Blocks where Great Horned Owls have been found. Thorough coverage of the targeted Blocks is the core of the project, but reports from all Blocks provide additional species and valuable detail on distribution. Quads with multiple dots reflect Horned Owls found in these additional Blocks. Areas with no dots represent areas where no Horned Owls have been reported, yet.

Atlasing Briefs

THIS MORNING (LATE JUNE) I HAD WHAT WILL PROBABLY END UP being the “surprise of the season” in my Hulaco CE Atlas Block (just west of Arab in Marshall County).

The morning started very foggy but the birds didn’t seem to mind as song and activity were good. At mini route stop #6 I was busy ticking off meadowlark, blue grosbeak, indigo bunting, chat, yellowthroat, field sparrow, etc., when I became aware of a repeated faint call coming from a thick grove of trees about 100 yards away. As all the other similar calls to be expected were ruled out I became more and more convinced I was listening to the first Black-billed Cuckoo I’ve ever heard in the field!!!

I pulled out the NGS tape and played their version which matched almost to a T what I was hearing. My bird was giving a series of 10-15 “coo-coo” call pairs and then waiting a few minutes before starting the series over again. Only once or twice did it throw in a third note as the NGS tape indicated was possible. The tonal quality and cadence between my bird and the tape were identical.

I attempted to attract this bird closer for a look using the tape but as far as I could tell he didn’t reveal himself or come any closer.

This Hulaco CE Block has turned out to be probably the “birdiest” Block I’ve worked in during our project. I confirmed Cedar Waxwing two weeks ago and the Brown-

headed Nuthatches were playing again today around the parking lot of the Brookside golf course. Today a Cooper’s Hawk was harassing a Red-tailed Hawk in the mist. The American Kestrel near stop #6 made a repeat performance today. Several Gray Catbirds were mewing me to stop and check them out both trips. A tailless Black-and-White Warbler popped up today where I heard a Louisiana Waterthrush two weeks ago. A male Summer Tanager also appeared at this same creek crossing today. About the only

Status of the 628 Targeted Blocks

Number of blocks falling within the species ranges as the project has progressed.

No. of Species	Accomplished			Projected		
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
80+	1	2	5	8	12	15
70-79	4	12	27	30	35	40
60-69	17	67	113	170	230	260
50-59	42	109	167	220	240	260
40-49	35	55	75	80	66	53
10-39	68	71	69	70	45	0
<10	461	314	172	50	0	0

disappointment was not hearing the Song Sparrow today that I found two weeks ago on the outskirts of Arab. With a total of 75 species thus far, I really like this Block!

—Steve McConnell, Hartselle

SUNDAY MORNING (MID-JUNE) BEFORE CHURCH PAT AND I were checking the Tallassee Quad and found a young—not immature, according to Sibley—White Ibis and at least a pair of Dickcissels (probably two pairs) and two Common Ground-Doves near our home in Tallassee, Alabama.

Also, we found a pair of Kentucky Warblers, but without any other evidence of breeding. I've previously asked the landowner for birding privileges, which he has denied. I'll watch for fledglings.

—Bob Reed, Tallassee

THE ACCESS TO THOMPSON QUAD CE BLOCK CONSISTS MAINLY of one road running from the west boundary right across the east. If Sedgewood Plantation can talk one landowner into selling, that road could be blocked off with a "no-trespassing" sign as is most of this Block. So, it was good to get out there today and see some birds while the birding was available.

I found a spot without any signs forbidding entry and walked out to see if I could find some hardwoods birds, since pines predominate along the road. Unsuccessful in that regard, but successful in finding birds.

At approximately 6:30, I saw a small vireo with another bird nearby to use for size comparison. The considerably larger other bird turned out to be one of two fledgling Bachman's Sparrows to which two adults were attending. The vireo was much smaller, brownish-backed, buffy-sided, crisply wing-barred (one cream, one white) with a head patterning that seemed like little more than a pale supercilary. The bird was so much smaller than the sparrow that I could not help but entertain the thought of Bell's Vireo. It moved on without first allowing me to rule out White-eyed and left me studying the sparrows.

Even if they don't count for atlasing, I enjoyed having four Wood Storks fly overhead. And the King Rail just outside the Block was another nice bonus. All well worth 3.5 hours leave.

—Larry Gardella, Montgomery

Regional Coordinators

Region 1—Florence

Dr. Tom Haggerty, 256-760-4432

TMHaggerty@una.edu, and

Dr. Paul Kittle, 256-767-6260, PDKittle@una.edu

Region 2—Huntsville

Steve McConnell, 256-773-8560

swmavocet@aol.com

Region 3—Birmingham & Tuscaloosa

Stan & Dana Hamilton, 205-951-5630,

birders99@aol.com

[Birmingham falls in Region 3, but it is also close to parts of Regions 1, 2 and 4.]

Region 4—Leeds to Anniston

Greg Harber, Birmingham, AL 35205

205-251-2133, gharber@mindspring.com

Region 5—Prattville, Selma

Shawn Reed, 2208 Wynhaven Dr, Prattville 36067

334-365-8564, smcreed@juno.com (new address)

Region 6—Montgomery to Auburn

Larry Gardella, 334-613-0690, tanagerlfg@aol.com

Region 7—Greenville, Monroeville

Charles Kennedy, 334-382-5737

ckennedy@alaweb.com

Region 8—Greenville to Dothan

Don Ware, 850-862, 6582, donware@earthlink.net

Region 9—Mobile

Howard Horne, 251-666-7490 (h) 251-633-6100 (w),

hhorne@earthlink.net

State Coordinator

Richard L West, 2808 Rabbit Hill Road

Tallahassee, FL 32308

800-707-4382, 334-324-6477(c),

RickLWest@aol.com

AOS Census Committee Chairman

Greg Jackson, 205-987-5167

g_d_jackson@bellsouth.net (new email address)

Finding Eastern Screech Owls in Areas You Do Not Know

By LARRY GARDELLA

MANY ALABAMA BIRDERS KNOW OF PLACES NEAR where they live where they can find Eastern Screech Owls. It is harder for a birder to find one in an area the birder does not know. Random searching in open woodland can turn up Eastern Screech Owls, (ESOW) particularly where grain fields, orchards, meadows or marshes abut the open woods. However, the chances of success improve when one targets an area with one particular feature: an isolated bright light.

Giff Beaton told Shawn Reed to look for Screech Owls in open woods in the country near a bright light. While conducting one of his breeding bird atlas runs in the pre-dawn hours, Shawn noticed a church with a bright light next to it. He stopped and played his ESOW CD. Three Screech Owls responded!

Armed with a duplicate of the CD for my boom box, I went to the CE Block of the Collirene Quad in Lowndes County. Playing the CD just past the edge of a cluster of houses with some lights yielded no success, so I continued my pre-dawn searching. I drove to a different part of the Block, where a dirt road cut through an open wood. Coming round a bend, I found a church standing alone in a clearing with a bright security light burning.

I played the call for maybe a minute. Nothing. I played it another 30 seconds or so. Quiet. Dawn was approaching. Since I had already heard Barred Owls, and Bob Reed recorded Barn Owls in the Block last year, I got out the Great Horned Owl CD. Before I put it in the boom box, an Eastern Screech Owl started calling to my right. Several seconds later, another Eastern Screech Owl to my left joined in. Both continued even after I played the GHOW CD.

Bright lights attract many insects, which at least supplement a Screech Owl's diet. A site that provides this food source as well as common small mammals may be especially attractive to Eastern Screech Owls.

A Fine and Pleasant Madness: Update

THE DARK BUTEO WE IDENTIFIED AS A ZONE-TAILED HAWK AT Ft. Morgan is a Short-tailed Hawk, immature dark phase. This is the word from the experts, Brian Wheeler and Bill Clark who wrote the book on hawks. At least we didn't call it a dark Swainson's or a melanistic Broad-winged!

What a revelation! Brian Wheeler said, after viewing the pictures we sent of the bird, "This is an 'all-dark type' as seen on plate 252 of my new *Raptors of Eastern North America*. This was a previously undescribed plumage type for juvenile dark morphs." What a season!

—Bob and Lucy Duncan

Alabama Bird Records Committee

DURING THE ALABAMA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL Meeting at Lake Point State Park on January 24, Barry Flemming, Greg Jackson, Steve McConnell, and Shawn Reed were elected to three-year terms on the Committee. Larry Gardella was elected Secretary. The Committee is as follows:

Member	Term Expires
Larry Gardella, Secretary.....	2005
Dwight Cooley.....	2004
Bob Duncan.....	2004
Barry Flemming.....	2006
Greg Jackson.....	2006
Steve McConnell.....	2006
Shawn Reed.....	2006

Deadlines for Yellowhammer Submissions

Summer 2004	June 1, 2004
Fall 2004	August 15, 2004
Winter 2004	November 15, 2004

AOS SPRING MEETING 2004

Meet Our Speaker: Dr. David M. Bird

By COLONEL BOB REED

EVER WONDER HOW BIRDS ARE EQUIPPED TO PRODUCE those warm, fuzzy chicks in the nest? Not all is as it seems. Join Dr. David M. Bird as he takes you on a humorous "bird's eye-view" of the seemingly indecent world of avian reproduction involving the Mile-High Club, incest, homosexuality, divorce, and infidelity. It simply puts television soap operas to shame! You may never look at birds the same again. But bring a hanky, because several birders have told me you will be laughing so hard you may shed a tear or two!

As a professor of Wildlife Biology and Director of the Avian Science and Conservation Centre of McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Dr. David Bird has published over 115 scientific papers on birds of prey, supervised 30 graduate students, and written and/or edited seven books, including

City Critters: How to Live with Urban Wildlife and in 1999, both the *The Bird Almanac: The Ultimate Guide to Facts and Figures on the World's Birds* and *Bird's Eye-View: A Practical Compendium for Bird-Lovers*. With several awards for his conservation efforts under his belt, Dr. Bird is a past-president of the Raptor Research Foundation Inc. (an international organization devoted to birds of prey), past-vice-president of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists, an elected Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union, a member of the Board of Directors of the American Birding Association, and an elected member representing Canada on the prestigious International Ornithological Committee. Besides his innumerable public lectures and radio and television appearances, Dr. Bird is a regular columnist on birds for *The Gazette* of Montreal and *Bird Watcher's Digest* magazine.

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

THIRD FRIDAY—April 16-18, 2004
Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island

SECOND SATURDAY—May 8, 2004
North American Migration Count

SECOND FRIDAY—October 8-10, 2004
Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island

FOURTH FRIDAY—January 28-30, 2005
Winter Meeting, Guntersville, Alabama

Important Sea Lab Changes

THE SEA LAB HAS CHANGED ITS POLICY REGARDING rooms for AOS. We will only be allowed one floor instead of two, and the price has increased to \$15 per night, per person, based on double occupancy. Please note that as we only have one floor, we will no longer assign only one person to a room. You must have a roommate. If you do not ask for one by name, one of the same gender will be assigned. If we have an odd number of registrants for the Sea Lab, the last person will have a private room, but no other. If there are unused rooms, please do not ask to move to a vacant room. It will not be allowed. Also, as we have only half the number of rooms, rooms will be assigned on a first-come basis, *based on a paid registration*, not a phone call. Your AOS board and leadership have tried very hard to have these policies softened, but these are the policies until further notice.

AOS SPRING MEETING 2004

Dauphin Island, Alabama, April 16-18, 2004

FRIDAY, APRIL 16

- 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, APRIL 17

- 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—Dr. David M. Bird

SUNDAY, APRIL 18

- 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, April 16. 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 Members Slide Show at 7:00 p.m. on Friday night.

AOS SPRING 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 April 1, 2003

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

(See Box Opposite)

Friday Night
 How Many _____ Amount \$ _____

Saturday Night
 How Many _____ Amount \$ _____

Registration @ \$10 per person	\$
Banquet @ \$18 per person	\$
Sea Lab @ \$15 per person per night	\$
AOS 2004 Dues	\$
DIBS Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
Coastal Birding Association 2004 Dues (\$5)	\$
TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 24, NO. 1 • WINTER 2004

EDITOR.....Bob Reed
DESIGN.....Robin McDonald
ILLUSTRATIONS.....Annabel Markle

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Larry Gardella • Stan & Dana
Hamilton • Greg Harber • Carroll
Pinckard • Rick West • Jeff Wilson

The Yellowhammer, the newsletter of the Alabama Ornithological Society, is published four times a year. Editorial Office: 88838 Tallassee Highway, Tallassee, AL 36078. Send articles to be considered for publication to: reedala@aol.com. Subscriptions to *The Yellowhammer* and *Alabama Birdlife* are included in the AOS annual membership dues. Single copies \$2.00. Complimentary copies available for review and promotional purposes.

Address correspondence concerning membership to:
Shelly Ducharme, Treasurer
1026 DeKalb Street,
Auburn, AL 36830
e-mail: mducharme@mindspring.com

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



AOS ONLINE
<http://www.bham.net/aos/>

**AOS RARE BIRD ALERT
TELEPHONE HOTLINE:**
(256) 751-4788

THE NEW AOS ONLINE RETAIL STORE
<http://www.withoutbricks.com/aosstore>

ALABAMA WILDLIFE REHAB CENTER
<http://www.alawildliferehab.org/>

SOUTHEASTERN RAPTOR REHAB CENTER
<http://www.vetmed.auburn.edu/raptor/>

SHOALS AUDUBON SOCIETY
http://www.ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Bill_Rogers_AL/

FRANCIS M. WESTON AUDUBON SOCIETY (PENSACOLA)
INFORMATIONAL HOTLINE (850) 934-6974
<http://www.pcola.com/audubon>

THE HUMMER/BIRD STUDY GROUP
<http://www.hummingbirdsplus.org>

BIRMINGHAM AUDUBON SOCIETY
<http://www.birminghamaudubon.com>

TENNESSEE VALLEY AUDUBON
<http://fly.hiwaay.net/~pgibson/tvas/index.html>

SOUTH ALABAMA BIRDING ASSOCIATION
<http://www.bamabirds.com>

ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

88838 Tallassee Highway
Tallassee, AL 36078