

# THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 23, NO. 3 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY WINTER 2003

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

FOUNDED 1952



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**L**ET'S FACE IT; WE EACH HAVE OUR own way of birding. Some of us look upon each bird with a sense of mystery, wondering what strange name this one has. Is it a Northern Cardinal on the southern coast of Alabama or a Magnolia Warbler in a hackberry tree? They are pretty, but they just don't make sense. Sometimes they can be confusing.

Others of us look at a bird, mentally tick off Hooded Warbler and go on searching for more prey, the next tick mark on our list. Some of us want to share each bird with the person next to us, maybe for pride of "I saw it first" or just to be friendly, or perhaps, sensing that our neighbor is an inexperienced birder, to assist them in enjoying the bird too.

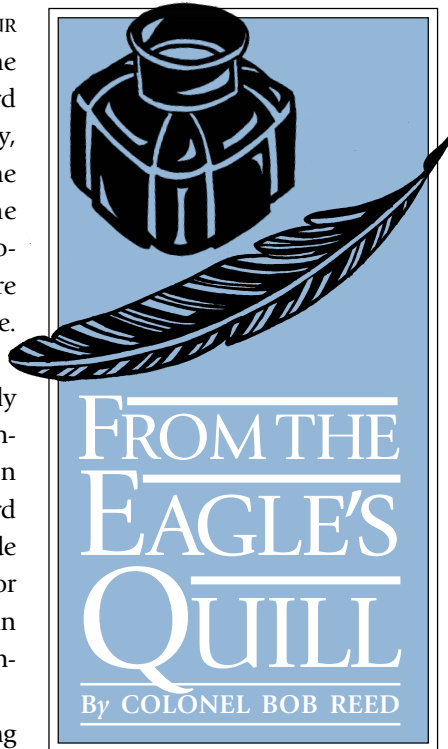
A few of us can spend hours discussing the finer points of differentiating immature Citrine Wagtails from Yellow Wagtails, in the hope of making an intelligent decision of what was really seen wandering, very lost, at Fort Morgan last October. (See Bob Duncan's report in this *Yellowhammer*.)

Others find the most enjoyment by taking a chair to a promising spot, whether it is our own yard or a spot at Dauphin Island, seating ourselves in it, and waiting for whatever the winds bring. Along the same line, we are fortunate to have a few who will take a camera and sit for hours, perhaps very uncomfortably, to take a close-up picture of a bird to share with the group.

Finally, still others study the habits of a particular bird, or species of birds, hoping to increase one's own knowledge, or our collective scientific knowledge.

And what do we see when we see a bird? Some of us see a bird and immediately thank God for creating such beauty to enjoy. Others see the conservation concerns about the bird, realizing that, though there is a Wood Thrush here and now, the vast majority of Wood Thrushes are gone.

Have I made my point? There is no wrong or right way to bird. (Well, okay, we all agree that birding by shotgun is wrong, but even that at times has a legitimate place in the scientific community.) What feels right to me may feel all



wrong to you. That's one of the beauties of birding. My way of birding rarely, if ever, infringes upon your way of birding, and vice versa. We may get in each other's way occasionally, but so what? There are enough birds to go around. So far.

So, let's have fun birding! During my tenure as caretaker of this organization, I will do everything within my power to have fun and to give you the opportunity to do the same. What I ask of you is simple: while you are enjoying birds your way, don't be intolerant of others as they bird their way.

We are in the midst of a wonderful five-year project to develop a Breeding Bird Atlas. This is a fabulous way to give to future birders a resource that will be used for decades. This can be an ideal way of having fun while advancing the knowledge about birds in Alabama. I strongly

encourage each person reading this to get involved with this project by noting the signs of breeding around you, beginning with Great Horned Owls in early December, and continuing through midsummer. Every new record counts. See the Spring 2003 issue of *The Yellowhammer* for details.

I pledge to you that I will do everything reasonably possible to assure that AOS grows, that birds and bird habitat will be protected, and that you will be given the opportunity to serve as you enjoy the birds of Alabama. Together we can make a difference.

I want to commend the officers that just completed their terms, particularly Allen Tubbs, who just finished two years as President, Karen (and Mike) Wilson, who served so faithfully as Treasurer, and Sara Whitfield, who was a wonderful Secretary for AOS. There are countless others who serve on committees, handle the hundreds of details for meetings, serve as regional coordinators for the BBA, conduct Breeding Bird Surveys, CBCs, and migration counts, lead field trips, work on *The Yellowhammer* and *Alabama Birdlife*, and a long list of other tasks, great and small. My special thanks to Rick West, who is so ably and selflessly serving as general for the BBA.

Please don't forget to participate in a Christmas Bird Count near you.

## A Fine and Pleasant Madness

By BOB DUNCAN

**L**ITTLE DID I SUSPECT THAT THE COLD FRONT advancing southward September 27, 2003, would herald the beginning of the most eye-popping fall migration I have witnessed in 36 years of birding. The next 30 days brought a cascade of incredible rarities rivaling the accumulated decade of notable birds. In the early morning hours of September 28, the front pushed through coastal waters with winds shifting to the north and NNE at 17 to 21 mph. Lucy and I decided to bird at home in Gulf Breeze, Florida, finding a modest influx of migrants, topped by a Golden Eagle and an assortment of hawks. We decided to take advantage of the cool, dry weather expected through the next day by going elsewhere. Choices: Ft. Pickens, the Ft. Walton Beach Spray Fields, Dauphin Island or Ft. Morgan? It was a Monday, when traffic is lighter along the coast, so why not go west to Ft. Morgan? *Never underestimate Ft. Morgan's surprises when the first strong front of the season passes!* And I was not disappointed except that Lucy had stayed home at the last minute.

I arrived at Ft. Morgan on September 29 with Cecil Brown, meeting David Dortch and birding the Stable area first. David called me over to see an odd warbler in a pine. It flew off, but not before we got good looks. It was a bird I'd seen before, somewhere in the past, and I began to suspect Lucy's Warbler, but having no western guide with us my anxiety mounted. Returning to the car, we pulled out the National Geographic Society guide and realized it was not Lucy's, but a **Virginia's Warbler**, a potential first state record!! What a find!

After an unsuccessful search to relocate the bird, we decided to walk through the dunes to Mobile Point and look for water birds. We were flushing Palm Warblers when David called my attention to a bird

perched about 100 feet away on a low bush. Almost in stunned disbelief I exclaimed (among other things), "Wag-tail!" a bird I'd seen only in field guides!! The scope was already set up and I got it immediately in view, allowing all of us to get good leisurely looks...but before David could get a picture, it flew farther off, calling as it flew. Only hunger compelled us to go back to the car where we consulted the guide and concluded it was a **Yellow Wagtail**, another potential first state record!! After much effort trying to reach Lucy, we finally got a call through to Ann Forster who contacted her. In twenty minutes, Lucy was on the way having called birders in Birmingham, Mobile, Dauphin Island, Pensacola, and Ft. Walton, and putting a frantic note on the Alabama and Florida listservs. By the end of the day, twelve birders saw the bird, including Lucy, who drove wildly, somehow without a speeding ticket, from Gulf Breeze.

Two potential first state records in one day? Ft. Morgan had lived up to its reputation monumentally!! But there was more to come.

On October 10 at Ft. Morgan, the Hummer/Bird Study Group banded a **Yellow-green Vireo**, a tropical species and another first state record. Knockout pictures by David Dortch appeared on the Alabama and Florida listservs. Three days later, on October 13, they banded a **Pacific Slope/Cordilleran (Western) Flycatcher**, another potential first state record—the fourth in 15 days!! Meanwhile, Barry Fleming of Opelika found a **Say's Phoebe** at Ft. Pickens on October 13, a first area record and about the sixth for Florida. I was at Ft. Pickens at the time and didn't know Barry was there, finding a note on my windshield with directions to the bird. In my haste to find him and the bird, I got the car stuck, the first time ever at Ft. Pickens...aargh, frustration! Barry contacted Lucy by phone, and once



again she sped off for the chase. Our efforts to find and confirm it were unsuccessful that morning, but the following day Lucy and I began a methodical search grid to relocate it. Instead of finding the bird ourselves, we found David Simpson of Brevard County, Florida, who had just seen the bird moments earlier. A quick posting to the listservs brought David Dortch who captured and posted beautiful, poetic pictures on the two state listservs.

By October 14, we'd caught our breath, finished transcribing notes and writing details of the great birds, and were ready for more. *More?* But how could there be more? Then on October 15, another strong front with fresh northeast winds came through in the early morning hours...and again Ft. Morgan beckoned.

We—Cecil Brown, Betsy Tetlow, Lucy and I—were barely beyond the ferry gate at Ft. Morgan when a large dark hawk crossed the road in front of us and plunged toward the beach near the fishing pier. We piled out of the van, leaving doors wide open in the middle of the road. The bird lifted up from the beach on long, deep wing strokes and headed south over the pines. Quick! back to the van...the chase was on! We were certain it was a Buteo, though soaring at times it looked like a Turkey Vulture with a dihedral. *Now* what? It flew back and forth across the peninsula during the morning as it hunted, fed, and soared. Ann Miller joined us and, along with Lucy, photographed the bird. It lingered through the following day when Bill Summerour, and Dick and Linda Reynolds got to see it. We concluded, after much study, that our original call, **Zone-tailed Hawk**, a visitor from the extreme southwest United States and the tropics, was correct. *Another* potential first state record!! Ft. Morgan produced an incredible *five* potential first state records in 17 days!! Could any other location in the lower 48 states beat that?

But it wasn't finished to the east in the Florida Panhandle. Morris Clark found the endangered **Kirtland's Warbler** in his north Pensacola yard where it foraged for several hours on October 17. This was the first Panhandle record since Francis M. Weston's 1953 sighting. Then, October 23, Alan Knothe and Larry Marler discovered a **Sage Thrasher** at the Ft. Walton Beach Spray Fields, a seventh Florida record.

Not to be outdone, Ft. Pickens had the last hoorah, and a fine hoorah it was. On October 25, Lucy led a Coastal Birding Association trip there. I almost didn't go, as the

weather was warm, muggy and unbirdy. After a fairly birdless morning, we stopped at Battery Langdon to show off a favorite birding spot. Sitting on a picnic table looking down at a bird not 15 feet away was novice birder Dick Giese who called us over. Isn't that a Chipping Sparrow? Yes, I said, having seen only the head of the bird and shooting from the hip. Howard Horne and Lucy, with more cautious heads prevailing, studied the bird more closely. **Tree Sparrow!!** This bold little bird feeding almost at our feet on grass seeds was a 'lifer' for most of us, and only the second Florida record! It lingered through the next day and was seen by over 18 observers, some from as far away as Miami and Athens (Georgia, that is). Peggy Baker's and David Dortch's stunning photos appeared simultaneously on the listservs.

In fewer than 30 days, nine super rarities appeared in our area, a situation which probably won't be repeated for years to come. Maybe by that time we will have recovered from the shock.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: On October 31, 2003, a Flammulated Owl suffering a broken wing, another first Alabama record, was picked up off a street in Mobile, and has undergone successful rehabilitation. The likelihood that this bird arrived as cargo on the same weather systems as the others is high.

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### *Heart of a Small Town*

**R**OBIN McDONALD, AN AOS MEMBER and designer of *The Yellowhammer*, is the author of a new book of photographs of Alabama towns entitled *Heart of a Small Town* which was published by the University of Alabama Press in August 2003, and which is currently available in bookstores across the state as well as online with amazon.com, bamm.com and barnesandnoble.com. A November review in the *Mobile Register* describes Robin's "stunning sense of color" and states that all of his images are "beautifully executed." The photographs are accompanied by carefully selected quotations from Alabama authors such as Harper Lee, Truman Capote, and Rick Bragg. Many of us birders will have encountered these small towns as we have ventured into the highways and byways of Alabama in search of birds. Now we have an opportunity to share some of these experiences with others through the pages of this book. —Alison Glascock

## Toh Festival Report

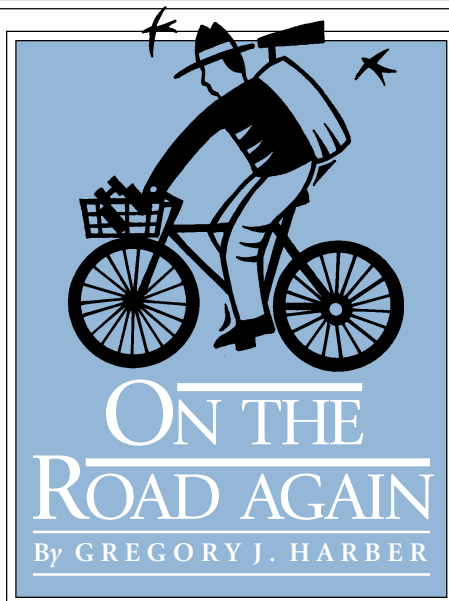


BARBARA BYRD WROTE IN THE Fall 2003 *Yellowhammer* of a trip that she and Sylvia Fullerton took last March to lay the groundwork for a sister site partnership being developed between DIBS and Pronatura de Peninsula de Yucatan (PPY). In doing so they visited several birding locations in the Yucatan peninsula and met with many individuals, including a dedicated woman named Barbara McKinnon.

AOS members at the fall meeting will recall that Eduardo Galicia, a guest of DIBS, visited with us for the weekend and spoke about the fine conservation work PPY is doing. Building an awareness of any such endeavor is critical to its long-term success. In an effort to cultivate an awareness of the birds and their plight, Barbara McKinnon, with the help of Eduardo and many others, organized the Toh Festival (Toh is the Mayan word for the Turquoise-browed Motmot). I had the pleasure of attending the Second Annual Toh Festival with Barbara and Sylvia from November 15-23, 2003.

Before the festival began we made two side trips from Merida, which served as our home base. On Sunday we motored over to Celestun to visit with the school children and deliver gifts of binoculars and books. While there we also joined in a party of "Peregrinos" participating in a local birdathon organized by Eduardo. Monday afternoon we made our way to San Felipe, situated on the northern coast of Yucatan near the Ria Lagartos Biosphere Reserve. This quaint little village lies at the end of the world. I came for one night only but could have stayed for weeks, soaking up the warmth and the water.

On Wednesday afternoon, our birdathon team—composed of me, Barbara, Sylvia, plus our two guides, Alex Dzib and Ramiro Castillo and our driver—set out for The Hacienda Uxmal. There we were joined by the other half of our team: Christina Lasche, who works for The Nature Conservancy, her



mother, Inge, and Maria Andrade (Eduardo's boss). The cozy understated elegance of the hotel helped to soften the buzzing of my alarm at 4:30 a.m. but after all, this was a birdathon and we had birds to see!

We began our quest at 5:15 on the grounds of the Uxmal Mayan ruins. Daylight arrived slowly under the canopy of the trees and so the first hour was spent birding by ear in the darkness. Thankfully Alex and Ramiro knew the many calls. Once it was light we began to see at least some of the birds that were all around us, including several familiar warblers. Three hours later

we made our way back to the van at the hotel and after a short break for snacks, we set forth on the route to Celestun.

We stopped at several locations along the way, always looking and listening for birds but also taking a moment to enjoy the scenery too, for the butterflies were everywhere! Along the very "birdy" Chunchucmil Road I paused to investigate a movement in the tangled underbrush. There in my binocular view was a male Painted Bunting, who was joined a moment later by a female. Pleasant enough, until I noticed more movement a bit further back. Tick-tock, tick-tock. It was a Turquoise-browed Motmot slowly flipping its tail from side-to-side in an exaggerated motion. Wow! As difficult as it was to tear myself away, we pressed onward, arriving in Celestun as darkness fell.

If you've ever wondered how big the universe is, I can tell you it is huge! We began our birding early Friday morning under the magnificent canopy of stars at the Hotel Eco-paraiso Xixim, on the beach six miles north of Celestun. A Bare-throated Tiger Heron split the night with his loud calling and a Common Pauraque squinted up at us from the roadside. At Herradura the sight of the American Flamingos standing in the tidal flats took my breath away, their pink colors vibrant in the early morning light. I must admit I stopped birding long enough to take some photos.



We wrapped up our birdathon at an abandoned ranch east of Celestun, on the way back to Merida. Just beating the 10:00 a.m. deadline were a Common Tody Flycatcher and a Ruddy Crake. The Peregrine Falcon and White-tailed Hawks

were a few minutes shy of countable. Our final tally for 29 hours of birding was 177 species, which was good enough for third place. The Friday banquet featured a beautifully done short film about the Turquoise-browed Motmot. I now know why it won an international film festival award.

American Birding Association representatives attended this year's festival to see what the excitement is all about, for next year the ABA will be holding their meeting in Merida. It will run concurrently with the Toh Festival. I encourage everyone to make plans to attend and join in the festivities. Come early or stay later to take in the Mayan archeological ruins. You won't regret it.

## *North Alabama Birding Trail Project*

By MARK SASSER

**T**HE ALABAMA DIVISION OF WILDLIFE AND FRESHWATER FISHERIES' Nongame Wildlife Program is officially announcing the development of The North Alabama Birding Trail. The trail will include approximately 50 diverse birding sites traversing the Tennessee Valley in north Alabama. A list of the proposed sites has been compiled from recommendations from wildlife biologists, bird enthusiasts, and other conservation organizations. Each site nominated will be visited and evaluated based on a site evaluation criteria list, which not only includes birdwatching characteristics, but ecological significance as well. Also site resiliency to public use without environmental damage and maintenance support from the landowner will be factors in the selection process. Each site selected will be identified by an interpretive sign at the site location and directional signage along highways and roads. Map guides and informational brochures will be published providing site locations, bird photos, and specific site characteristics related to birdwatching and significant habitat types. Six to eight kiosks will be constructed in key locations to further provide detailed

information as to each site in that specific geographic area.

The presence of a birding trail in North Alabama is expected to provide wildlife enthusiasts with a quality outdoor birding experience from both a recreational and educational aspect as it relates to bird conservation, and a significant economic boost to the Tennessee Valley area.

Initial development and planning, as well as project bid specifications, have been underway for over a year. The project officially started September 10, 2003, with completion expected no later than Spring 2005.

A link to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' website, [www.dcnr.state.al.us](http://www.dcnr.state.al.us) will be coming soon to carry updates of the progress of the birding trail. Additionally, the website [www.fermatainc.com/alabama/index.html](http://www.fermatainc.com/alabama/index.html) will carry updates of the progress and plans of the contractor building the trail. For more information about this exciting birding project, contact Mark Sasser, Nongame Wildlife Coordinator, Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 64 North Union Street, Montgomery, AL 36130, phone (334)-242-3469 or email [msasser@dcnr.state.al.us](mailto:msasser@dcnr.state.al.us).

# A Tragic Loss

By JEFF R. WILSON

**I**N THE FALL OF 1986, I READ AN ARTICLE IN THE NEWS that they had decided to capture the last three wild California Condors in an effort to save the species. I was stuck that I might never experience these birds and hurriedly got a few friends together and we journeyed out to California. We went to the regular places and stood around for hours and on our last afternoon we stood at an overlook with a group of students talking. Suddenly, directly above us, a rustling in the wind and there in a slow glide and low enough to hear the wind flowing over its wide outstretched wings was a wonderful bird, no, a magnificent bird.

A silence spread across the group as each discovered the bird and after it had sailed out over the valley, you could hear everyone exhale and a nervous chatter spread through the group. Only then did I notice that not only I, but every other soul that had a camera, never once thought to take a photo. It was the type of experience that happens a few times in a birder's career; you just stand and stare.

We did manage to see all three of the wild birds that afternoon and I do have a shot of three distant dots in the sky. I think of that experience time and again.

In late February 2003, the California Fish and Game Commission, in a press release, disclosed that condor #AC8, the last condor born in the wild to wild parents, was found dead on February 18. The bird had been re-released back into the wild after a long stay in captivity. My mind raced back to a time some 17 years ago when this bird had graced me with its presence and a great loss was felt. Even more remorse and guilt followed when I read the bird had been shot.

We have a lot of work to do; we have to bring more people to the same understanding that some Indians had: we do not own the earth, nor its animals, nor its plant life, but are stewards only. We have a trust that is slowly, much too slowly coming into focus for more and more each day. Will the realization come too late?

I have no qualms with hunters or hunting, but I would like to know just what went through that person's mind,

when that creature fell from the sky. He cannot take away the experience I had on that mountainside, years ago, but due to his callousness, there is a vacant feeling in my heart which will take time a long time to heal. I take this murder personally.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The shooter did take away a similar experience from countless others. On May 14, 2003, a hunter with a history of violations pled guilty to killing #AC-8. Unfortunately, he was charged under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act instead of the Endangered Species Act, which carries a stiffer penalty. On August 15, 2003, Britton Cole Lewis, 29, of Tehachapi, California, was sentenced to a fine of \$20,000, five years on probation, no hunting for those five years, 200 hours of community service, and he forfeited his gun. He was also ordered to pay the state of Illinois \$180 for killing a White-tailed Deer illegally.

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## *Frequently Asked Questions About Dues*

### *When are dues due?*

Dues for each calendar year are due in January. Your 2004 dues are should be paid with your registration for the winter 2004 meeting, or if you are not able to attend that meeting, then send them to the Treasurer as soon as possible. They are considered late and you are considered to be in arrears if you have not paid by the spring meeting.

Obviously, we do not want to lose any members for any reason, but often we have no way of knowing a member's intentions if we haven't heard from them by the April meeting.

### *How do I know if I've paid my dues?*

Your mailing label has a number in the upper right hand corner or the word "Life." The number indicates the last two digits of the last year of your paid membership.

### *How can I become a Life Member? Is it worth it?*

Individual life memberships are \$200 and family life memberships are \$300. Life memberships are currently about 13-15 times the annual dues rate. However, there has not been an increase in dues for many years, and a life membership will protect you from any future increases.

AOS FALL MEETING 2004

## *Fall Meeting Report*

By GREGORY J. HARBER



THE FALL AOS MEETING WAS AN INTERESTING ONE indeed. The weather was certainly a factor throughout the weekend and our speakers on both nights delivered captivating and thought-provoking presentations. If you'll indulge me, I'd like to share my thoughts and comments on the weekend.

Any sane person would have said that the weather was terrible, and it was for the first half of the weekend. But as birders we know that weather fronts generally bring in the birds and so, while bad weather presents yet another obstacle for the migrants, it is a phenomenon that birders gladly welcome. And whoever said we were sane anyway?

The weekend for me began on Thursday, with the pelagic birding trip out of Orange Beach, arranged down to the last detail by Steve McConnell. We greeted the dawn with generally good seas and bright skies but as the day wore on the skies clouded with the front approaching from the west. We never did find any pelagic species but that is the risk one takes. Birds taking a break on the various oil rigs provided our saving grace. A Peregrine Falcon perched regally atop a tower and a Mourning Dove was huddled down on another. Fly-by Cattle Egrets looked out of place on the open ocean.

Hurrying to catch the last ferry as darkness fell, I was rewarded with the sight of a Peregrine Falcon cleaving the skies above the Middle Ground at Fort Morgan. A Common Nighthawk, recognized more by its erratic flight than anything else, was the last bird of the day. The ferry crossing was rough, with the sea spray and the gloomy skies seeming as one.

Not surprisingly, Friday morning dawned cloudy but at least there was no rain. I was thankful for this since I had to install "Please Stay on the Path" signs at the Goat Trees Sanctuary before birders started to arrive for the weekend. As I was leaving to return the posthole digger to John Porter a few sprinkles started to fall. The wet weather had arrived. After lunch, at the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc. (DIBS) board meeting, Carolyn Snow brought news of what was to be the first of many interesting sightings that weekend: a Yellow-green Vireo had been banded that very morn-

ing at the Sargents' Fort Morgan banding station! A first state record for this Mexican and Central American species! A few lucky birders were there to witness the banding crew at work as they took the measurements and necessary photos to properly document the bird. As Duane Berger later recalled when he first retrieved the bird from the mist net, "I knew I had something special."

At the Friday night program Rick West updated the audience on the progress of the Alabama Breeding Bird Atlas. It was encouraging to see the fruits of our efforts starting to pay off. Much has been accomplished but there is still much of Alabama that remains to be properly surveyed. This is one endeavor in which everyone can take part and enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done. Consider atlasing your favorite neck of the woods if you have not already done so.

Eduardo Galicia, of Pronatura Peninsula de Yucatan, DIBS's sister site and a bird conservation organization in Mexico, spoke to the gathering about conservation efforts being done in Celestun and elsewhere in northwest Yucatan. PPY has been working to train the "Peregrinos" as birding guides, instead of pursuing their fishing jobs which are becoming less productive. Knowing that the future starts with today's children, PPY is also working with the local schoolchildren to teach them about birds. (See my other article about PPY on page 4.)

Saturday morning brought ominous-looking clouds but thankfully the front had passed and the worst of the weather was to our east. Since our field trip was headed to Fort Morgan this was a relief! As a Royal Tern flew past the jetties on the east end, the contrast between the white bird and the black and purple clouds was startling. Leading the group about the fort's grounds we never did find the Vireo but Jeff Wilson did put us onto a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in the Middle Ground near the Wall. Back on the island crowds were enjoying the migrant show at the Shell Mounds and Goat Trees. Was it just me or did that Wilson's Warbler at the Goat Trees hang a shingle out on the oak limb? He seemed to be there every time I looked!

Dr. Ken Meyer presented our Saturday evening program, speaking about a species that I know must be a favorite for many: the Swallow-tailed Kite. Using tiny transmitters capable of being tracked by satellite, Dr. Meyer's research has unraveled many of the mysteries of this species' migration as he tracked individual birds all the way from Florida to southern Brazil and back. In addition to the successes, the tracking patterns also revealed the fate of those birds who did not survive the return trip across the Gulf in the spring. It seems tragically ironic to me that the trait we most admire in the species, its buoyant and acrobatic flight, would leave it powerless against the winds of a front penetrating into the Gulf. At the same time, this aerodynamic mastery enables it to catch insects on the wing. I can almost imagine that the Creator gave this bird a choice, power or grace, and it chose grace. And he replied, "Your strength shall be your weakness and your weakness shall be your strength." Perhaps, here there is a lesson for all of us.

Sunday morning brought more bird reports as I emerged from my room at the Gulf Breeze: a Western Kingbird was just down the road at the little park near the hotel. The skies were clearing and a Merlin went screaming past on the breeze. The compilation was conducted at the Goat Trees Sanctuary just after the Dedication Ceremony, during which we recognized the importance of the Goat Trees to birds and birders alike. Many thanks to all who attended and especially to those who made it all possible!

The confluence of the winds and weather resulted in a very respectable 188 species for the weekend. We can all look forward to the spring when our friends return, but in the meantime there is the January meeting at Lake Point Resort State Park in Eufaula. Reports are already filtering in about winter hummers and even a few winter finches too. Could this be another invasion year for them? Only time will tell, but maybe the winds and the weather will deliver once again! Hope to see you there.

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## *AOS Executive Board Fall Meeting*

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By KAREN WILSON

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AT THE FALL MEETING OF THE AOS EXECUTIVE BOARD on Saturday, October 11, 2003, the following actions were approved:

The board decided that life memberships, which for several years were placed in the Certificate of Deposit, but have for two years been placed in the general operating fund because of the low interest rates, will remain a part of the general operating fund.

The new slate of officers was nominated and approved by the board and approved by acclamation by the membership: President—Colonel Bob Reed; Vice President—Stan Hamilton; Treasurer—Shelly Ducharme; Secretary—Karen Wilson. Col. Bob Reed will continue as editor of *The Yellowhammer*.

Rick West reported on the progress of the Breeding Bird Atlas, saying that this project is on target for completion for 2006.

Participation in the North American Migration Count has waned in recent years, but the board enthusiastically

supported the continuing AOS commitment to this nationwide snapshot of migration.

Col. Bob Reed reported that the winter meeting in January of 2004 would be held at Lake Point Resort State Park in Eufaula with Giff Beaton as speaker, and the speaker for spring will be ABA Board member David Bird.

The president will work with the management of the Sea Lab to continue the longstanding relationship between AOS and the Sea Lab.

Conservation chair Bob Reid submitted the following letters from projects he is working on and the board ratified them: National Forest Management; Beach Nourishment at Orange Beach; Alabama National Forest Management; Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa Water Allocation; and Freshwater Mussel Critical Habitat. He also reported that Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa water allocation is ongoing and Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint water allocation has failed.

The board recognized and thanked Allen Tubbs for his service as AOS president the last two years.

## Fall 2003 AOS Compilation List Dauphin Island, Alabama, October 10-11

**N**OTEWORTHY BIRDS OF THE weekend included Eared Grebe, Roseate Spoonbill, Rufous Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied, Traill's, and Vermillion Flycatchers, and Bell's and Yellow-green Vireos.

Pied-billed Grebe  
*Eared Grebe*  
Northern Gannet  
American White Pelican  
Brown Pelican  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Magnificent Frigatebird  
Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret  
Snowy Egret  
Little Blue Heron  
Tricolored Heron  
Reddish Egret  
Cattle Egret  
Green Heron  
Black-crowned Night-Heron  
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron  
White Ibis  
**Roseate Spoonbill**  
Black Vulture  
Snow Goose  
Canada Goose  
Mallard  
Mottled Duck  
Blue-winged Teal  
Northern Shoveler  
Green-winged Teal  
Osprey  
Northern Harrier  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-shouldered Hawk  
Broad-winged Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
American Kestrel  
Merlin  
Peregrine Falcon  
Clapper Rail  
Virginia Rail  
Sora  
Common Moorhen  
American Coot  
Black-bellied Plover  
Snowy Plover  
Semipalmated Plover

Piping Plover  
Killdeer  
American Oystercatcher  
Black-necked Stilt  
American Avocet  
Greater Yellowlegs  
Lesser Yellowlegs  
Willet  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Long-billed Curlew  
Ruddy Turnstone  
Red Knot  
Sanderling  
Semipalmated Sandpiper  
Western Sandpiper  
Least Sandpiper  
Pectoral Sandpiper  
Dunlin  
Stilt Sandpiper  
Short-billed Dowitcher  
Long-billed Dowitcher  
**Jaeger species**  
Laughing Gull  
Ring-billed Gull  
Herring Gull  
Gull-billed Tern  
Caspian Tern  
Royal Tern  
Sandwich Tern  
Common Tern  
Forster's Tern  
Black Tern  
Black Skimmer  
Rock Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
White-winged Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Common Ground-Dove  
Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
Common Nighthawk  
Chimney Swift  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
*Rufous Hummingbird*  
Belted Kingfisher  
Red-headed Woodpecker  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Eastern Wood-Pewee

### Yellow-bellied Flycatcher

Acadian Flycatcher  
Least Flycatcher  
**Traill's Flycatcher**  
Eastern Phoebe  
**Vermillion Flycatcher**  
Great Crested Flycatcher  
Western Kingbird  
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher  
Loggerhead Shrike  
White-eyed Vireo  
**Bell's Vireo**  
Yellow-throated Vireo  
Blue-headed Vireo  
Philadelphia Vireo  
Red-eyed Vireo  
**Yellow-green Vireo**  
Blue Jay  
American Crow  
Fish Crow  
Purple Martin  
Tree Swallow  
Northern Rough-winged Swallow  
Barn Swallow  
Carolina Chickadee  
Tufted Titmouse  
Brown-headed Nuthatch  
Carolina Wren  
House Wren  
Sedge Wren  
Marsh Wren  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
Eastern Bluebird  
Veery  
Gray-cheeked Thrush  
Swainson's Thrush  
Wood Thrush  
American Robin  
Gray Catbird  
Northern Mockingbird  
Brown Thrasher  
European Starling  
Blue-winged Warbler  
Golden-winged Warbler  
Tennessee Warbler  
Orange-crowned Warbler  
Northern Parula  
Yellow Warbler  
Chestnut-sided Warbler  
Magnolia Warbler  
Black-throated Blue Warbler  
Black-throated Green Warbler  
Blackburnian Warbler  
Yellow-throated Warbler

Pine Warbler  
Prairie Warbler  
Palm Warbler  
Black-and-white Warbler  
American Redstart  
Worm-eating Warbler  
Ovenbird  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
Kentucky Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
Hooded Warbler  
Wilson's Warbler  
Yellow-breasted Chat  
Summer Tanager  
Scarlet Tanager  
Eastern Towhee  
Chipping Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow  
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow  
Seaside Sparrow  
Swamp Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
Northern Cardinal  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Blue Grosbeak  
Indigo Bunting  
Dickcissel  
Bobolink  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Common Grackle  
Boat-tailed Grackle  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Orchard Oriole  
House Finch  
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.

## BOOK REVIEW

## Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds

Reviewed by LARRY GARDELLA

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The Georgia Ornithological Society sent AOS a copy of Giff Beaton's new Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds, 5th edition, and asked that we review it. This comes at a particularly fortunate time as Giff is our Winter speaker. Larry Gardella graciously agreed to review it for AOS.*



THE "SPECIES TO LOOK FOR" SECTION NEAR THE END of Giff Beaton's previous book, *Birding Georgia*, gives the status of most species with some idea where the species can be found. The "Regular Species List," which constitutes the bulk of the *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds*, goes far beyond this. It provides early and late dates, more detailed location information and a more precise account of status, including high counts for various regions. It annotates more accidental and rare species, including all nine species of hummingbird confirmed for Georgia. The Regular Species List also provides much more current information, including data on the five species added to the Georgia list in 2002.

The *Annotated Checklist* begins with a twelve-page introductory chapter with four detailed and highly helpful maps, an account of the extensive changes since the fourth edition came out in 1986, descriptions of the physiographic regions of Georgia and statements about the species accounts, including definitions of status codes and a list of the abbreviations used in the text. Following the Regular Species List is a Provisional Species List consisting of eight species for which there are accepted records in Georgia but no photograph and no specimen. Next comes a Hypothetical Species List of 31 species that have not been accepted due to questions about identification or origin. Finally, the book has 25 pages of bibliography and a two-page index.

A comparison with the 1977 edition shows more birds, a fair number of birds with status changes, often due to more

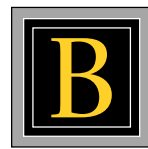
complete information. An asterisk quickly indicates that there are breeding records. Each record ends with the location of documentation for the species.

Either alone or in combination with a bird-finding guide, this book will help a birder figure out how, when and where to look for Georgia's birds. It also enables one to take an interesting look at differences between Alabama's checklist.

It is not easy to find fault in this well-structured and carefully written book. I have but one, fairly minor complaint. Some accidental species are written up as if they are only ever to be expected in the one location where they have been found. For example, Pacific Loon is "accidental at Plant Wansley," and Western Grebe "accidental at St. Simon." It would be better to call each "accidental," insert a semicolon or other punctuation mark and then say where the bird has been found.

## Birders' Best Friend Award

By COLONEL BOB REED



BECAUSE OF THEIR THOUGHTFULNESS AND ASSISTANCE to members at our recent Dauphin Island Meetings, AOS bestows with pleasure its Birders' Assistance Award on John Stowers and Terry Hartley, who, assisted by Tom Shehan, generously furnished, without any compensation, the ferrying service for birders from the Isle Dauphine Club to Pelican (formerly Sand) Island! Not only did they ferry our members but provided delightful beach hospitality in the form of a card table with red-checked tablecloth, bananas and oranges and a cooler full of bottled water!

The visits to this barrier island were not only a pleasure for our members but permitted surveying of the island's birdlife. Some highlights were Wilson's, Snowy, Piping and Semipalmated Plovers, Black-necked Stilts, Oystercatchers, Dunlins, Least, Gull-billed and Sandwich Terns, an Osprey and nesting Mottled Ducks (pair with eight ducklings). Also, a small flock of American Avocets flew by. That's a lot! We are so glad John and Terry enjoy driving their boats out in the Gulf since we certainly enjoyed the Pelican Island visits.

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

## Meet the Speaker: Giff Beaton

By COLONEL BOB REED



GIFF HAS BEEN BIRDING FOR 30 YEARS, AND IS PARTICULARLY interested in migration, especially of warblers. He is the author of *Birding Georgia*, and the senior author and editor of the recently released *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds*. He

has also written numerous articles and gives slide shows all over the southeast. He is currently working on an annotated checklist for Kennesaw Mountain and a field guide to Georgia dragonflies. He and his wife Becky live in Marietta, GA.

## West Point Dam and Blanton Creek WMA

By GIFF BEATON



THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT FROM 2004 WINTER MEETING speaker Giff Beaton's *Birding Georgia* describes the West Point Lake Dam and the Blanton Creek Wildlife Management Area:

**Habitats:** Pine Forest, Mixed Pine/Hardwood Forest, Weedy Fields, Freshwater Marshland, Reservoir

**Key Birds:** Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Gulls, Ducks, Wild Turkey

**Best Time To Bird:** October through March

**The Birding:** This section will cover West Point Lake Dam and the Blanton Creek Wildlife Management Area. While the entire lake can be good birding, this section concentrates on the dam area for waterfowl, which is one of the best areas for waterfowl in Georgia during migration. The dam is also good in winter for gulls, and has hosted several rarities over the last few years. Blanton Creek WMA is not far downstream on the Chattahoochee River, and has a good marsh area for dabbling ducks as well as some good general land birding in forest and fields.

**Directions:** This section starts from the north, but could easily be birded in reverse order. To begin at West Point Lake, exit I-85 at Exit 2. Go west toward the Alabama border on GA 18 1.4 miles to the town of West Point, which

is the best spot for food or gas along this route. Turn right on US 29/GA 14 for 3.3 miles to Resource Management Drive and turn left. There is a large sign for West Point Lake here. At 1.6 miles on this road, the Resource Manager's Office is on your right, which has exhibits, maps, restrooms and information. You can pick up a map here to bird other areas of the lake if you like. The woods around the office usually have a few landbirds present, and check the feeders in back. Continue toward the dam, which begins in 0.3 mile. You have several choices here. You can park in the small lot on your right before the dam, and scan all of the area above the dam. Or, you can drive completely across the dam and take the first left (0.9 mile from the parking lot), and turn left again in 0.2 miles to reach a parking area and overlook below the spillway. Both areas should be checked. The area below the dam is a good spot to look for gulls. Most will be Ring-billed, with a few Herring and sometimes Bonaparte's as well. This lake in particular can be good in late fall and early winter for Forster's Tern. Although unlikely, keep your eyes open for any other species of gull as well, as several rare gulls have been found here over the years. Above the dam, scan for any waterfowl. Common Loons are usually here in winter, along with Horned Grebes in deep water and Pied-billed Grebes around the shoreline. During duck migration especially, almost any duck species can be found

here so scan carefully. This can be as good a lake as any in migration for scoters, and has been good in recent years for Common Goldeneye in midwinter. Most of Georgia's rarer ducks have been seen here at one time or another. If the dam is not generating, many of the gulls and terns will be loafing above the dam, and there will be Double-crested Cormorants as well. There are some pretty good pine forests around the dam area to check for landbirds as well. When ready, take the road continuing from the small parking lot above the dam on a 0.5 mile loop which offers more lake to scan, and takes you back to the main road. Turn left to return to US 29/GA 14. Return to I-85, but continue under the interstate for 0.4 mile to GA 103, and turn right.

The first entrance to Blanton Creek WMA is 7.3 miles on the right. This dirt road is usually in good shape, but be careful if it has rained recently. The best duck spot here is Mark Prevatt Memorial Marsh (no hunting allowed), but there are some great weedy fields for sparrows and mixed woods for landbirds along the way, so bird your way along this road for 1.7 miles to a T-intersection. Turn right, and park immediately at the sign. Walk down the left-hand road 0.2 mile toward an open area and go toward the bright green sign. To get to the marsh, walk down the hill below this sign. Unfortunately, the way this spot is designed, you are walking down a graveled hill directly toward the water and the ducks know you are coming long before you can actually see most of them. Consequently, this may be an excellent opportunity for you to practice your "ducks in flight" identification skills! You may try walking slowly down the hill and scanning along the way, or walking along the edge of the trail to avoid most of the gravel. Once at the bottom, you can scan both sides for whatever ducks are present, usually dabbling ducks due to the shallowness of the area. The last several years this has been a good spot for wintering wild Mallard and American Black Duck. Wood Ducks are permanent residents, and the mixed pine/hardwood forest around the marsh offers good birding as well. Some winters there are a few Rusty Blackbirds wintering here as well. To leave, retrace your route back to GA 103. Turn right on GA 103 and drive 6.5 miles to GA 219. Note the WMA Check Station is 0.5 mile past where you rejoin GA 103, but is not usually manned. At GA 219 continue straight ahead to I-185 at Exit 25 to exit the area.

**DeLorme Map Grid:** Georgia p. 24 E2/F2, p. 32 H1

**For More Information:** West Point Resource Management Office. (706) 645-2937. Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

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### *Electronic Yellowhammer?*

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**I**T 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 reed@psc.state.al.us.

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### *Missing Persons*

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**E**VERY TIME WE SEND OUT AN ISSUE of *The Yellowhammer* several copies are returned, marked "Moved, forwarding time expired" or words indicating that we've lost contact with someone else. That makes us sad. To the extent possible, we try to find the missing members, but often, that isn't successful.

If you are moving soon, or if you have moved recently, **please** send your new address to the treasurer, or to the Editor. We'd hate to lose track of you.

### *Important Dates*

#### **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS**

December 14, 2003 to January 5, 2004

#### **FOURTH FRIDAY—January 23-25, 2004**

Lake Point State Park, Eufaula

#### **THIRD FRIDAY—April 16-18, 2004**

Dauphin Island

#### **SECOND FRIDAY—October 8-10, 2004**

Dauphin Island

#### **SECOND SATURDAY—May 8, 2004**

North American Migration Count

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#### **Deadline for *Yellowhammer* Submissions:**

Spring 2004 Issue                      February 14, 2004

Summer 2004 Issue                      June 1, 2004

## AOS WINTER MEETING 2004

*Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge, Alabama, January 23-25, 2004*

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2004**

5:00 p.m. Registration table opens at Lake Point State Park Lodge  
 6:00 p.m. Dinner on your own  
 7:00 p.m. Member slide show

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 24, 2004**

6:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast  
 7:00 a.m. Field Trips—Meet in Lodge parking lot  
 3:30 p.m. AOS Board Meeting—Location TBA  
 6:00 p.m. Social Hour  
 6:45 p.m. Buffet Banquet – Lodge  
 7:45 p.m. Program—Giff Beaton

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2004**

6:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast  
 7:00 a.m. Field Trips—Meet in Lodge parking lot  
 12 noon Compilation—Lodge

**ACCOMMODATIONS AND INFORMATION**

The AOS Winter Meeting 2004 will be at Lake Point State Park Lodge with birding in the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge.

**LAKE POINT STATE PARK LODGE**

(800-ALA-PARK)  
 40 rooms held until January 9, 2004.

**BEST WESTERN—EUFAULA INN**

(800-528-1234)

**HOLIDAY INN**

(334-687-2021)

**JAMESON INN**

(800-541-3268)

**NO FRIDAY NIGHT POT LUCK!**

Don't forget that there is no Friday Night Potluck at the Winter Meeting. Make your own plans for dinner. Save your recipes for the Spring Meeting.

### AOS WINTER MEETING 2004 REGISTRATION FORM

*Complete and return to:*

Shelly Ducharme, Treasurer, 1026 DeKalb Street, Auburn, AL 36830  
 e-mail: [mducharme@mindspring.com](mailto:mducharme@mindspring.com)

*Please make checks payable to AOS and remit by January 10, 2004. No refunds after January 10, 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

Registration @ \$10 per person	\$
Banquet @ \$16 per person	\$
AOS 2004 Dues	\$
Coastal Birding Association 2004 Dues (\$5)	\$
DIBS (FODIAS) Land Purchase Fund Contribution	\$
<b>TOTAL ENCLOSED</b>	<b>\$</b>

# THE YELLOWHAMMER

VOLUME 23, NO. 3 • WINTER 2003

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

## CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

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

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

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



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## ALABAMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

88838 Tallassee Highway  
Tallassee, AL 36078