

**WELCOME TO MISSISSIPPI: A LETTER FROM JUDY TOUPS**

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In the spring of 1986, while in graduate school at Penn State University, I was offered a position as curator of the Mississippi Entomological Museum at Mississippi State University. I happily accepted the offer despite never having visited Starkville or Mississippi State. Being an avid birder, I was eager to learn whatever I could about Mississippi's bird life prior to leaving my native Pennsylvania and starting my new job in Mississippi at the end of August. However, I could find very little information on Mississippi's birds as no state or local bird book or bird finding guide had been published at that time. The only Mississippi birder that I had ever heard of was Judy Touns. I had read several articles that she had authored in birding magazines, and she was listed as a subregional editor for *American Birds*. She also had fielded a Mississippi team in New Jersey's "World Series of Birding" birdathon during the same two years that our team from Penn State participated in the event, although I never met her on those occasions. I wrote to Judy to see if there was a list of Mississippi birds available and if she could suggest some good places to find birds in the state. The following letter is her reply. It certainly made me feel welcome to Mississippi and excited about birding in the state and is typical of the encouragement and help that Judy gave to many birders. In the years to follow I would have the

opportunity to share many birding adventures in Mississippi with Judy Touns.

4 Hartford Place  
Gulfport, MS 39507  
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Dear Terry,

Enclosed find latest Mississippi checklist, replete with errors. Hope it will help you. You should really enjoy birding here; as you can see from the list, we have a very interesting and varied avifauna.

When you get to MSU look up Dr. Jerry Jackson in the Department of Biological Sciences; he is a first class ornithologist. Also you might touch base with some of his students....a good friend of mine, Mal Hodges, will be at State this fall in the graduate program. I consider Mal the best birder in the state, and feel that he would welcome companionship in the field.

If you get to the coast, by all means phone me (896 3153) and maybe we can explore together.

We have a state ornithological society (Mississippi Ornithological Society) which meets each spring and fall...not sure exactly when and where the fall meeting is, but Dr.

Jackson can help you on that later. You will also find that there is an Audubon chapter in the Starkville area...they do a CBC and I'm sure would welcome your contribution.

The hot spots in the Starkville area are pretty much terra incognita to me, but Noxubee NWR always has a good variety of birds. The best birding is on the coast, naturally. Spring and fall migrations are seldom dull anywhere in the state. Some other good areas are at Grenada and Sardis lakes, Barnett Reservoir at Jackson, Yazoo NWR in the Delta, etc. I know it won't take you long to find some heretofore unknown birding hot spots yourself.

If you are in the state in mid-August, why don't you attend the AOU meeting at state (details enclosed) and I'll see you there.

Please forgive this short and uninspired response to your inquiries...just returned from Florida and mountains of work await. However, lay aside your apprehensions...you are coming to a state that has been underbirded until quite recently, and much remains for a birder with pioneer spirit!

Judy Toups