

# Central Southern Region

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While sifting through the great mass of bird records that mysteriously comes my way at the end of each winter, I began this year to ponder the significance of these records, apart from the support that they provide to me as editor of the regional report. Though these hundreds of cards and documentation forms do not fully represent the "reality" of the bird season, they are nonetheless collectively closer to that reality than my distillation of them will be in this season report. Probably no one will ever again view them as a complete collection, since the cards get returned to several different sites for archiving. This knowledge has made me try to render the "gestalt" of the cards as accurately as I am capable, but my own biases and knowledge gaps will inevitably lead to distortions of the truth that, we are told, is out there, either as partially represented in the cards or as completely but unknowably represented in the birds themselves.

This exercise in telling the tale of the winter's birdlife has made me more aware of just how little we know about the continent's avifauna. How, after all, can a report of 3000 words or so embody all the ornithological goings on that occurred in the Region last winter? Obviously it can do only so much. It can say, for instance, that the regional weather was milder than the weather of the previous winter, and that less snow fell on most parts of the region than fell last year. It can point out that major invasions of some species did not occur (*i.e.*, nuthatches and siskins) but that an irruption of a less common species (*i.e.*, Red Crossbill) took place—although it can't say why that irruption irrupted. But the report can't really get at the essence of the season because so much that happened ornithologically was not represented on the cards and forms that I read before I wrote.

So I ask all readers to send in even more records next winter than they did for 1996–1997, and I ask them to provide summaries of the season as they experienced it and, more importantly, as they

think the birds experienced it, so that we get a little closer to the truth—which is, after all, out there—next year.

**Abbreviations:** A.B.R.C. (*Alabama Bird Records Committee*); p.a. (*pending action*).

### Loons to Herons

Red-throated Loons were reported from all states within the Region except Louisiana, making it one of the best seasons for this scarce species in many years. Two Pacific Loons stayed in *Escambia*, FL Dec. 5–Feb. 27 (RAD, †PT, m.ob.), where the species has now been recorded about a dozen times. In Alabama the species is now annual and was noted in *Baldwin* Dec. 12 (†GEH, SL) and Jan. 4 (†RRR), with different birds involved in the 2 sightings; two in *Henry*, TN Dec. 7 & 15 continued a fall record (JRW ph.); two others in *Panola*, MS Dec. 21 (MD) were considered accidental. Finally, a small loon in *Fourchon*, LA Feb. 26 (†CMD) was thought to be a Pacific, which, if confirmed, would furnish a first for the state. On Jan. 30 a count of 370 Com. Loons (GDJ) was made in *Marshall*, providing an inland Alabama maximum number, while a concentration of >575 Horned Grebes in *Dekalb* Feb. 23 (SJS) established a Tennessee maximum number. A W. Grebe in *Henry*, TN Dec. 7–8 (JRW ph., RO) was unusual, as were others in *Marshall*, AL Dec. 14 (†WS, JS), *Lafayette*, MS Dec. 21–22 (MD, RH, GK), and *Jefferson*, AR Feb. 1 (KN, LN); the Alabama bird repre-

sented that state's 3rd of this species and only the 4th of the *Aechmophorus* complex.

A N. Gannet in *Limestone* Jan. 29–Feb. 5 (CL, †LMS, †LB, JW) provided Alabama's first inland record and must have been quite a sight. Rare so far inland, an ad. Neotropic Cormorant visited *Evangeline*, LA Dec. 28 (BF). A good count of six Reddish Egrets, including one extremely unusual white morph, was made in *Lafourche*, LA Jan. 25 (PW, BMM, RDP, GG).

### Waterfowl to Raptors

Sixth locally, an imm. Tundra Swan briefly alighted in *Escambia*, FL Dec. 9 (AF, DF), the southernmost of numerous Regional sightings. Trumpeter Swans in *Faulkner*, AR Dec. 28 (MJ, DP) and Jan. 3 (DH) may have been the same individual. Florida's 5th Ross' Goose, and first for the state's panhandle, stayed from late November until early January in *Franklin* (DM, m.ob.); the species turned up frequently in more northerly Regional locales. One–two Cinnamon Teals in *Orleans*, LA, in January (PW) and February (GO) were rare. From Dec. 8–Jan. 19, a ♂ Eur. Wigeon remained in *Morgan*, AL (RRR, †SWM, m.ob.); another in *Orleans* Dec. 29 and Feb. 16 (†BMM, †RDP, †PW) provided a 3rd or 4th record for Louisiana. A count of 405 Buffleheads in *Limestone* and *Morgan* Dec. 18 represented an inland Alabama maximum number (*vide* GDJ). Common Mergansers were more commonly encountered in Arkansas than usual (HP, MP).

Sixteen Ospreys in *Baldwin* Jan. 4 (*vide* GDJ) provided an Alabama maximum



number, especially notable because established during winter, though winter Osprey numbers along the coast have been increasing in recent years. Earliest in the w. panhandle of Florida by 7 days, a Swallow-tailed Kite was in *Walton* Feb. 15 (WB). Ten Cooper's Hawks in *Limestone* and *Morgan* Dec. 18 (*fide* GDJ) comprised an inland maximum number for Alabama, while a N. Goshawk in *Lafayette*, MS Dec. 21 (GK, VT, BB) was considered rare. An ad. Broad-winged Hawk in *Plaquemines*, LA Jan. 5 (DMu) was the only one reported. Returning from the previous winter, a White-tailed Hawk was in *Jefferson Davis*, LA Dec. 8 (KF *et al.*). Golden Eagles were reported somewhat more frequently than during a "normal" winter. Perhaps also a returnee from last winter, a Crested Caracara in *Cameron*, LA Feb. 22 (†RS *et al.*) was once again hard to mistake. A Prairie Falcon in *Marshall* Dec. 26–28 (MEH, BH, †SWC, p.a. A.B.R.C.) was probably only the 2nd individual ever reported in Alabama, all other records undoubtedly stemming from a single individual that wintered 1985–1993; another in *Yalobusha*, MS Feb. 16 (GK, SK) was back for the 6th consecutive winter.

### Cranes to Gulls

A migration of >900 Sandhill Cranes in *Pickett*, TN Feb. 13 (WHG) was notable for its magnitude, as well as for the early date. A nicely photographed Solitary Sandpiper in *St. Tammany* Dec. 22 (†CGB) was unexpected. A Pectoral Sandpiper in *Chicot*, AR Dec. 20 (DRS) warrants mention during a season when shorebird finds were generally none too electric.

A Pomarine Jaeger in *Marshall* Jan. 25–Feb. 23 (LBR, †GDJ) established the first inland record for Alabama; another in *Cameron*, LA Dec. 21 (SWC) was at a site where the species is probably regular offshore in winter. A Little Gull in *Grenada* and *Panola* during January and February (GK, SK, MD) was the 10th for Mississippi. The 15,000 Ring-billed Gulls at the Enid Dam in *Yalobusha*, MS Jan. 20 (MD) represented an exceptional number. A California Gull was in *Cameron* Dec. 4 (SWC, DLD, \*L.S.U.M.N.S.). The usual complement of records of other scarce larvae was received, leading this writer to believe that their status did not change much this season.

### Doves to Nutcracker

Eurasian Collared-Doves were noted in several counties in Arkansas, where the species is rare but increasing (LN, KN); it was abundant at several sites in Alabama

(GDJ), where a state maximum of 146 was recorded in *Montgomery* Jan. 4, and n.w. Florida (SJS, m.ob.). Inland Mississippi records, representing recent colonization, continued from the fall (TS). Six Inca Doves Dec. 29 in *Evangeline*, LA (MA, MW), were reported from an area moderately far inland. Three–four *Chaetura* swifts in *East Baton Rouge*, LA Jan 5–10 (†RMG) were probably Vaux's.

Florida hosted good numbers of  $\geq 4$  species of hummingbirds during the period (RAD), though none was as magnificent as last winter's Magnificent. Arkansas had several Rufous Hummingbirds stay part of the winter (HP, MP). Alabama recorded its 3rd Broad-tailed, as well as two Allen's, the state's 9th and 10th, and a return of last year's Buff-bellied (RRS, MBS), then the state's 3rd. Ground zero for every winter's hummingbird explosion is always coastal Louisiana, where once again hummers were abundant, though not up to the numbers posted last winter. Newfield banded 78 birds of 6 species in Louisiana, making it the 2nd most productive season in her stint as a bander of hummingbirds, and paling by comparison only with her hummer haul of 117 last

winter. Louisiana's 6th Broad-billed showed up Jan. 4–11 in *East Baton Rouge* (†LBI ph., †JK, KF), where an Anna's was also present Dec. 15 (†MDa, †JK, m.ob.).

A Least Flycatcher in *Escambia*, FL Dec. 26 (RAD, LD) provided the first record for that month locally. Myriad *Myiarchus* flycatchers, mostly Ash-throated, were reported in Louisiana, but nowhere else. Mississippi's 2nd Cassin's Kingbird appeared in *Oktibbeha* Dec. 31 (TS, MS). Earliest ever in Alabama, three ♂ Purple Martins were in *Mobile* Jan. 2 (†MV, RWH). The bird of the season, Louisiana's first Clark's Nutcracker, visited *Natchitoches* Feb. 9–11 (†BMM, †PW, †JK, m.ob.).

### Wrens to Warblers

A Bewick's Wren was in *Montgomery*, AR Jan. 27 (LA); singles were in *Grenada*, *Oktibbeha*, and *Yalobusha*, MS Jan. 7 & 19 (GK, SK, PH), Dec. 31–Jan. 2 (TS, MS), and Dec. 23 (GK, SK, FB), respectively; another single showed up in *Acadia*, LA Dec. 20 (DMu, PY, RDP); these were the only reports of the season. *Cameron*, LA, provided residence for several Wood Thrushes throughout the season (m.ob.); few were reported elsewhere. About 10th



Providing an extreme example of a general movement of western mountain birds into the lowlands during the winter, this Clark's Nutcracker was in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, February 11, 1997. Photograph/Matthew Pontiff.

for Louisiana, a Sage Thrasher was in *Cameron* Dec. 21–22 (†CS, †PW). Two Sprague's Pipits wintered near the border of *Orleans/St. Bernard*, LA (DMu, PY), an easterly location where they are rarely found in the bayou state. Very rare in Louisiana during winter was a Bell's Vireo in *Plaquemines* Jan. 5 (DMu, KR, RS).

A Nashville Warbler in *Cameron* Dec. 22 (BMM), a ♀ Yellow Warbler in *Plaquemines* Jan. 5 (KR), and a Magnolia Warbler also in *Plaquemines* Jan. 5 (KR, DMu, RS) were rare finds in Louisiana during winter. A ♂ Black-throated Blue Warbler in *Putnam* Dec. 3 (BHS, SJS) provided Tennessee's 2nd, and middle Tennessee's first, winter record; a female in *Plaquemines*, LA Jan. 5 (KR, DMu, RS) stayed to the end of the period and was only the 2nd ever recorded on the long-standing Venice CBC. The 700 Yellow-rumped "Myrtle" Warblers in *Limestone* and *Morgan* Dec. 18 (*vide* GDJ) provided an inland maximum count for Alabama, while an "Audubon's" in *Baldwin*, AL Jan. 4 (RRS, MBS) furnished the state's 8th record of that form.

Black-throated Green Warblers were in *Cameron*, LA Dec. 22 (DMu, BMM, CS, PW), when an ad. female was noted, and Jan. 18 (JL, SL), when two females were found. A Black-and-white Warbler in *Chicot*, AR Dec. 20 (DRS) enlivened a local CBC in an area somewhat n. of the species' usually coastal winter range. The only Am. Redstart reported came from *Orleans*, LA Jan. 19 (PW). Northern Waterthrushes were noted in ≥3 Louisiana parishes, and Yellow-breasted Chats in ≥2.

### Tanagers to Finches

Many Summer Tanagers were reported from Louisiana; one in *Franklin* Dec. 28 (DM, †LM) was the only one reported from Florida. The only W. Tanagers with full details, including parish or county of location, showed up in *Jefferson*, LA Dec. 19 (†PY) and in *Pulaski*, AR Dec. 15–Jan. 7 (HS, KN, LN). The only Blue Grosbeak appeared in *Acadia*, LA Dec. 20 (PY, DMu, RDP). Many Indigo Buntings were reported from the coast, including quite a few noted in February, indicative of successful wintering; a female found Dec. 21 in *Washington* (DJ) provided the 2nd winter record for Arkansas, while another bird present in *Washington* Dec. 24–Feb. 11 (JR, MM) quickly became that state's 3rd record; the species winters somewhat more regularly to the east in Tennessee, where another winter record was added in *Humphreys* Jan. 4 (MLB *et al.*). Painted Buntings and Dickcissels were less frequently noted than Indigos,

except in Louisiana, where individuals of each species were noted in ≥5 parishes. Somewhat more inland than most, a Dickcissel in *Lauderdale* Jan. 20–Feb. 25 (PDK, DEK) was only the 2nd for the Tennessee Valley region of Alabama.

Lark Sparrows are irregular in s.e. Louisiana in winter, so two in *Lafourche* and one in *Orleans* Jan. 5 (GW) & 30–31 (PY), respectively, were noteworthy. American Tree Sparrows were reported from traditional wintering areas in Arkansas (KN, LN) and Tennessee (JRW). A White-crowned Sparrow of the *gambelii* subspecies in *East Baton Rouge* Jan. 12–Feb. 28 (MAS) was considered to be the first of that race recorded e. of the Mississippi R. in Louisiana. One Harris' Sparrow in *Carroll*, MS Jan 11–16 (BBa, PB) and a lone Snow Bunting in *Franklin*, TN Dec. 28 (†RLW) were nice finds. Three Smith's Longspurs in *Sebastian*, AR Jan. 3 (MM, DJ) were found in an area with much *Aristida* grass.

A flock of >1200 Rusty Blackbirds in *Grenada*, MS Feb. 2 (JRW) provided an impressive count of this icterid, as did 200 Brewer's Blackbirds in *Tunica*, MS Feb. 16 (JRW). Over 1000 Great-tailed Grackles in *Evangeline*, LA Dec. 29 (RJB, LC) represented far more than previously noted at this inland site; ≥23 remained until Feb. 27 (BF); the Great-tailed continues to increase in Arkansas (DJ). More than 10 Bronzed Cowbirds were in *Orleans*, LA Dec. 27 (KR, AJ), while a Shiny Cowbird was in *Apalachicola*, FL Dec. 28 (†AO, DM).

As noted in the fall report, Red Crossbills irrupted into Arkansas, where the species was reported in moderate numbers in ≥7 counties (HP, MP). The invasion extended to Mississippi, where 10–20+ were noted in *Panola* Dec. 1–Feb. 22 (GK, SK, BB), two of which were seen gathering nest material Jan. 25 (GK, PH), confirming, if confirmation were needed, the species' tendency to nest anywhere at anytime. And the crossbill invasion also reached Louisiana, where two–three were noted in *Vernon* Jan. 7 (†CES). Purple Finches were generally present in lower numbers than during a "normal" winter. Pine Siskins were infrequently reported, but did show up in most states, including Louisiana. Few Evening Grosbeaks were noted.

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