

Okatibbee Creek Audubon Society

December 2003

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To bring refreshments to the January 12,
2004, meeting:

Nancy Donald

No meeting in December except the CBC add-up on
January 3.

Our thanks to Ruth Ann and Lomax for the great
sandwiches in November! And by oversight we
forgot to mention our appreciation to the Broussards
for their shrimp etouffe in October—yummy!

Sightings

By **Ed Brown**: Many Goldfinches feeding on Sweetgum seed.
Jasper county on Tallahala W.M.A. and Caney Creek W.M.A. in Scott
county.

11/28/2003 Cedar Waxwings in Scott county during the high winds
that day.

By **Van McWhorter**: 12/03/2003 Huge flock of pipits in Twitley Branch around 11 in the morning. Also several Buffleheads, and Cormorants. Okatibbee Lake.

11/28/2003 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Back yard, Suqualena. Dark-eyed Juncos. Back yard ground-feeder. Suqualena.

11/28 Blue-headed Vireo. Mosley Crossing Road. Collinsville, MS.

11/29 Marsh Wren. Brown Pelicans. Slidell, LA.

11/30 White Ibis. Slidell.

12/3 30+ American Pipit. Twitley Branch Park, Okatibbee Lake. Lauderdale County.

12/3 6+ Bufflehead. Big Causeway. Okatibbee Lake.

By **Lauren Thead**: 11/8 Rufous Hummingbird, first winter male. Strawberry Plains Audubon Center, Holly Springs, MS.

11/19 Many Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeons, and Gadwalls; 2 Redheads. Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge.

11/21 American Pipits. Magnolia Drive, Macon, MS.

11/23 Four Hooded Mergansers. Four miles north of Meridian, Hwy 493.

11/26 Northern Harrier. Hwy 45 north of Macon, MS.

12/1 Two Great-horned Owls calling. Magnolia Drive, Macon, MS.

12/11 Swamp Sparrow completely missing tail! Seen with another completely-feathered sparrow. Magnolia Drive, Macon, MS.

Delta Birding with the JAS

By Nancy Donald

This past September I joined the Jackson Audubon Society for a field trip to Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, located in Washington County just west of Panther Burn. It had been a long time since I had been in that part of the Mississippi Delta. You forget how beautiful our Delta is. You just go down the hill in Yazoo City and there it is. Wide-open spaces and cotton fields as far as the eye can see. Add a bunch of experienced and enthusiastic birders and you have a perfect day trip. There were seven other folks including Skipper Anding, president of the Jackson chapter and Mary Stevens, who works at the Museum of Natural History.

On our way to the refuge, we made one side trip to look at a Baltimore Oriole's nest that Skip had found on a trip this past spring. It was still intact and clinging to a branch in an old oak tree. Just a little warm up before the actual birding!

At the entrance to Yazoo NWR we sighted our first good bird of the day, a female Painted Bunting with a juvenile. We searched a good while for the male but no luck. In Steele Bayou there were a white-eyed turtle and a few Great Blue Herons. Yazoo has a new boardwalk to a nice observation blind. Along the way were lots of butterflies, which Skip and Mary identified: Viceroy, Red-spotted purple, and comma, along with several kinds of swallowtail. At the blind, we observed several Blue-winged Teal and young Moorhen. There were also five young alligators about two feet long. No mother that we could see!

Also managed by the Yazoo NWR are some old catfish ponds, called Cox Ponds. Some of the best birding of the day was at these ponds. While we were eating our lunch on the pond levee, an Anhinga put on a great show. After fishing for a while, it perched on a feeding platform with its wings spread to dry about twenty-five feet from where we were parked. There were great numbers of egrets (Snowy, Cattle and Great), Blue-winged Teal, Wood Storks, White Ibis, Wood Duck, Mallards, Northern Shoveler and Pied-billed Grebes at this site. Also one Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

Across the road were even more birds. The water levels in these ponds were low allowing for more waders and shorebirds to feed. Also, there were plenty of dried lily pads for cover. I added quite a few life birds at this site.

I was hoping for a good look at a Purple Gallinule but we could not get close enough. There were a lot of Moorhens feeding under the lily pads and probably some gallinules but no definite ID. There were a lot of good birds but the standouts for me were the Black-necked Stilt and the beautiful flyover of a very pink Roseate Spoonbill.

Our caravan of cars left Yazoo NWR and headed south on Highway 1, part of the Great River Road. With a few stops on the side of the road, we were able to spot Horned Larks. These birds are hard to see. They like recently plowed fields and blend in so well that you don't see them unless they are sitting on top of the row or on the wing. We drove back to Jackson through part of the Delta National Forest from Rolling Fork over the Yazoo River to Satartia. You can see the ridge that runs the edge of the Delta from miles away. Skip pointed out that hawks and other birds migrate following that ridge of hills all the way to the Mississippi River to Vicksburg. A nice ending for a good day in the Delta.

It's That Time Again!

By Van McWhorter

Now what do you mean... What time is it? It's our favorite time of the year! It's time to head to the woods for a big hunting trip, to hunt for birds. Please not with a gun! So! This is a "Heads-up", get out your field guides and start studying now. Christmas Bird Count Day is right around the corner.

For those of you new to the event, please allow me to tell you a little about it. It's a one-day (24-hour) census of all the birds that are seen or heard within a designated 15-mile diameter circle. For us avid nature lovers this is one of our favorite days of the holiday season. This will be the Okatibbee Creek Chapter's seventh year to participate in this annual event. Our local count is only one of some 1,550 CBC's conducted in the United States, Canada, and even the West Indies. Can you believe this event has been going on since 1900? Another fact of interest: there are over 50,000 volunteers who participate in this holiday bird counting tradition every year.

Well! The Okatibbee Chapter members have set the date for the big Lauderdale County CBC. The event will be Saturday, January 3, 2004. So!

Please try and attend our pre-planning meeting scheduled for Tuesday, December 30, 2003, 6:00 PM at Ryan's Steakhouse.

You may wish to start pre-scouting some areas near your home if you are in the count circle. So! Get out those field guides and breeze up on those fall warblers, sparrows, and of course those Tiny! Kinglets. Please do not forget to take a look at some of our winter waterfowl. We are looking to break our 2002/03 count of 93 species.

Happy Fall/Winter Birding! Van

From Strawberry Plains....

⌘ **Please continue to keep in mind these upcoming events** ⌘

Exotic Weed Pull. Come help us rip out exotic or invasive plants, and get lunch and a free T-shirt!

We've still got two days scheduled for targeting pesky species such as Japanese stilt grass, Japanese honeysuckle, privet and kudzu—January 18 and March 6, 2004. For more information contact Chad Pope at 662-252-1155, or cpope@audubon.org.

[Editor's note: Those of us who pulled English ivy will be happy to describe the immense satisfaction we derived from yanking the stuff up...especially after a few hours of it. Madge Lindsay and the good staff at Strawberry Plains fed and entertained us in great style, in exchange for the work done on the MAS property.]

Winter Bird Count, Strawberry Plains Audubon Center. January 17, 2004.

Great Backyard Bird Count. February 13-16, 2004. Talk it up again and let's outdo even last year's astounding participation.

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| Remember, articles, bird sightings and items of interest are requested for the newsletter! |
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Van McWhorter's Super-Duper Peanut Butter Suet

1 Cup Crunchy Peanut Butter
2 Cups Quick Cook Oats
2 Cups Cornmeal
1 Cup Lard
1 Cup Regular Flour
1/3 Cup Brown Sugar

Melt lard & peanut butter in the microwave or over low heat. Stir in remaining ingredients and pour into square freezer containers about 1/2 in. thick to fit your suet basket. Store in freezer or refrigerator until ready to use. This recipe makes about 6-8 cakes. Yum! Yum!

--Note from Sheila: Don't leave this out on the kitchen counter. It seems good enough for us to eat.

Note from Rich Richardson: Meetings are held at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Meridian. Trinity is located at 4223 Poplar Springs Drive. Please use the **SOUTH** driveway on the church property (the one nearer downtown Meridian) and proceed around through the parking lot to the back, where you may enter the building through the double doors.
January 12, 2004, 7:00 p.m. See you there!

Events

Christmas Bird Count

Please remember that OCAS will be conducting the 2003 Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, January 3, 2004. Mark the date on your calendar. We will tabulate data later that night (6:00 p.m.) at the Collinsville Community Club building—bring goodies.

Please read Van McWhorter's piece in this newsletter concerning the count. Van would especially like for us to pay attention to the possibility of finding Eurasian Collared Doves and White-winged Doves, both of which are in our area and are showing up more and more. (In light of this, we have something about those in this newsletter.) --*Sheila*

The Guest Speaker for November, Maria (Neena)

Schleidt, with the U.S. Forest Service, presented a fascinating program on forest archaeology. Many thanks for sharing this with us.

A Helping Hand—or Two

By Howard Malone

This may be an update on my experiences of last season and this, so bear with me if I have repeated myself, either verbally or in print.

Last year, nearing the end of the growing season, I discovered several orange insect larvae with short soft black spines feeding on a Maypop (Passion Flower to some) vine growing wild up a tall stump in the cutover land behind the house. The sight reminded me that a friend of mine had told me that the Fritillary butterfly larvae feed almost exclusively on said plant. His daughter in New Orleans had established a butterfly garden for her three young sons and had bought commercial varieties of Maypops for the Fritillaries.

As the forage for the little ones was consumed, I began a program of “transplanting” the critters to other Maypop vines nearby so they might complete the life cycle.

Planning for the next season, I located and saved in pots under the house several dormant plants with their asparagus-like, although not as robust, roots. This spring I created a Maypop trellis by planting the plants alongside a section of concrete reinforcing wire. As nature intended, six plants broke dormancy, climbed the wire and began blooming---and producing food for the Fritillary larvae. (As an aside, Deer came and consumed the fruit as each matured and became sweet/sour.)

Concurrently with the Maypop plantings, I relocated several Mexican Sunflower plants, which had volunteered in an unsatisfactory area, to my compost pile. You may recall that I passed out seed at an early spring meeting. As the season progressed, the bright orange petals with the brilliant yellow centers of the flowers were a prime attraction to adult Fritillaries as well as other butterfly species; the Fritillaries would feed on the Sunflowers and then go over to the Maypops and lay eggs.

As fall once again approached, the pickings for the little ones once again became slim. And again I conducted my relocation program to help them make it to maturity. I even went so far as to “borrow” some leaves from my friend, who had bought a \$25.00 commercial Maypop species, to try to augment the food supply so they could complete the life cycle. At least I hope they made it to maturity; I have yet to find the chrysalis of a future butterfly.

My zeal must have energized my friend, Gene Kinard, as we have marked with survey flags a couple dozen wild Maypop plants for transplanting next spring to construct a Maypop/Mexican Sunflower butterfly garden at his house. Stand by for a full report next year.

2004 Bird Tips

by Lauren Thead

The 2004 Christmas Bird Count is quickly approaching, and if you’re anything like me, you’ve probably been spending a little time with the bird books, brushing up on the field marks of the birds you’re likely to see on the count day.

Why go over birds that you’ve seen several times on previous counts and that you can already identify? Well, when you’re counting on your route, you have to consider the amount of time that you have to survey each area of your route. You want to identify as many birds as you can as quickly and accurately as possible, so if you’re struggling to name a common bird, you can really be slowed down. Sometimes getting stuck on an identification is a good way to remember the problem bird in the future, but it’s better still to study species beforehand.

To that end, here are a few birds that might give trouble on the count, and some of their identifying traits. I won’t actually discuss 2004 of them, though!

Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks are fast, streamlined predators of songbirds. They are very similar, and you have to be cautious in the field identification of these two species. Although the Cooper’s is larger than the

Sharp-shinned, this can be difficult to tell. Usually the Sharp-shinned is shorter-necked and thinner-legged than the Cooper's Hawk, and its tail will be squared at the end. The brown juveniles can be separated by the streaking on their breasts (the Sharp-shinned has coarser, blurrier streaks).

Most people are familiar with the abundant Mourning Dove, but in recent years the introduced Eurasian Collared-Dove has spread far into Mississippi, and there are probably many in Lauderdale County. This dove is pretty distinctive, but if not seen well it could be tough to identify. It is a chunky bird and has a blunt-ended tail unlike the pointed one of the Mourning Dove. When it flies, its wings display dark wingtips and a pale wing interior. And of course it has a partial black ring around the neck. The Mourning Dove has a small black mark on each side of its face.

Just a warning: If you are fortunate enough to see a White-winged Dove on the count, you'll have to try to get more than a brief glimpse! Be sure to thoroughly document all unusual or rare species that you find.

There are a few small, olive-colored birds that can often be found in the same patch of woods that you may be confused with. One is the Blue-headed Vireo. This species has a proportionally large head and a thick bill. The coloring is actually sort of pretty in a subdued way. There are white "spectacle" markings on the bluish-gray head, a white throat, yellowish wing bars, and a yellow wash on the flanks. This bird moves slowly and deliberately like most vireos. The two kinglet species are amazingly tiny, fidgety birds with short tails. They both have wing bars, but their facial patterns are very different. The Ruby-crowned's eye-ring gives it a wide-eyed look, and the stripes on the head of the Golden-crowned Kinglet contrast sharply. Be sure to listen for the loud call of the Ruby-crowned; this can save you time in looking for the bird. The Orange-crowned Warbler at first glance resembles a kinglet, but it is much less fidgety and lacks wing bars. One of its few distinguishing marks is a pale eyebrow on the olive face.

Sparrows have a reputation for being really hard to identify, but the common species in Mississippi are easy to distinguish if you know them well. The Field Sparrow has a white eye-ring, bright pink bill, and long rounded tail. You'll probably find it in brushy woodlands or fields. The Chipping Sparrow has pale gray underparts, a brownish cap, and a dark eye-line. It can be found in woodlands with undergrowth. The Savannah Sparrow is

overall streaked brown, but it does have yellow on the lores (between the bill and eye). The Fox Sparrow is very large, reddish, and can be found in mixed woods. The Song Sparrow is a long-tailed species that is found in thickets, especially near water. It has bold head stripes and streaks on its breast forming a dark spot. The Swamp Sparrow is even more likely to be found around wetlands and has a gray face, white throat, and reddish wings. The White-throated Sparrow is one of the easiest to recognize with its bold head stripes and white throat bordered in black. Also listen for sparrow calls, which can help you to confirm your identifications.

Of course, we don't count all the *turkeys, old coots or cuckoos* that we might see along the route impeding our progress, but that kind of goes without saying!

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