

MISSISSIPPI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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NONA HERBERT
President
Route 2, Box 146
Shaw, MS 38773

JUDY TOUPS
Secretary, Editor MOS Newsletter
4 Hartford Place
Gulfport, MS 39401

NELLIE W. HUGHES
Treasurer
Box 1802
Mississippi State, MS 39762

JEROME A. JACKSON
Editor, Mississippi Kite
P.O. Drawer GY
Mississippi State, MS 39762

MOS NEWSLETTER

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MOS Spring Meeting

The Mississippi Ornithological Society will hold its annual Spring meeting at Starkville from 3-5 April 1981. The meeting will begin with a visit to the MSU Physics Department Observatory on Friday evening. Members and friends should meet in the Starkville Public Library parking lot at 7:45 PM to be escorted to the Observatory. The Oktibbeha Audubon Society is hosting the meeting and OAS members have a full schedule of events planned for Saturday, culminating in the annual banquet which will be held in the Mississippi State University Student Union. Reservations are required in advance for the banquet. Speaker for the banquet will be Dr. Jerome Jackson who will give a slide presentation on his recent visit to the Galapagos Islands. Field trips to local birding areas are planned for Saturday and Sunday. A picnic lunch at Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge is scheduled for noon on Sunday as a climax to the meeting. If you need additional information concerning the meeting, please call Roy Ollivier (323-4228) or Nellie Hughes (323-3368 evenings). We hope to see you there!

Publication and mailing of the MOS newsletter and the Mississippi Kite is the major expense of the Mississippi Ornithological Society. We as a society do not have tax exempt status, making mailing very costly (the last issue of the Kite cost \$35.00 to mail.) Before the Spring meeting, why not ponder the following questions:

1. How long has it been since you brought in a new membership?
2. Have you considered a double-membership? (You'd automatically receive two issues of the Kite).
3. Have you renewed your own membership in MOS for 1981?
4. Do you support MOS in the form of a donation apart from membership?
5. Would you object to a mailing fee over and above established dues?
6. Do you believe we should solicit business advertising as a means to make the Kite pay for itself?

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Dr. Jerry Jackson, editor of the Mississippi Kite, has a good supply of back issues, Volumes 2-10 and very limited numbers of Vol. 1. They can be obtained at \$2.50 per issue; Vol. 1, #1; Vol. 2, #1 & 2; Vols. 3, 4, 5, #1; Vols. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, #1 & 2.

A complete set of all issues of the Mississippi Kite should be a must for those with a serious interest in Mississippi's birdlife. Have you checked with your local public or university librarian about getting a complete set of these scientifically valuable volumes for their reference rooms?

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Thanks to all CBC compilers for such a good response for input on the CBC summary on the following pages. As a new editor, I need all the help I can get. If you have anything that wouldn't logically be better placed in the Mississippi Kite, please send it to me: that includes guest editorials, prose, poetry, local bird news, news of other bird-oriented organizations, advance news of field trips within and without this state, and some one-liners to keep things lively!

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A local golfer proved that truth is indeed stranger than fiction when his poorly driven ball plowed into a group of ground-feeding Tree Swallows, killing one and mortally wounding another. That says something about the critical food supplies on the coast this winter.

1980 Mississippi Christmas Bird Counts

Grenada Lake: 85 species, 10,677 individuals
 Marvin Davis: Compiler - Observers: 9
 January 3, 1981

Marvin calls 1980 "our best siskin year since 1977," and goes on to say "Extremely low reservoir level was favorable for shorebird species and numbers, also Great Blue Heron." Noteworthy were 15 Great Blue Heron, 80 Killdeer, 9 Greater Yellowlegs (1st CBC record in this 16 yr. old count), 45 Fish Crow, Common Yellowthroat (2nd CBC record), and low numbers of Savannah Sparrow.

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Hattiesburg: 106 species, 20,886 individuals
 Terrie Fairley: Compiler - Observers:
 January 3, 1981

(Ed. note: The following is Terrie's account which was written for the Hattiesburg American; because that editor found the term "dickey-birds" morally objectionable, and felt that low interest in birds in the H'burg area did not justify the space this article would have taken, he opted not to print it.)

Despite cold weather, fog, Bangkok flu, and droves of hunters, the Hattiesburg area Christmas Bird Count was a tremendous success, tallying just one species less than last year's count (the highest inland count ever recorded in the state.) Inland counts just don't produce as many birds as those along the coast. Eighty species would have been respectable, but then, who wants to be respectable?

What makes the Hattiesburg count so unique? Team effort! Every birder likes to find a rare bird, but it's going out to your assigned area, whether at a feeding station or in the field, and finding the birds that should be there that makes the numbers rise.

How do you find a hundred species in one given day in an area with no coastline, making chances of finding shorebirds almost zilch?

You hit the floor by 4 a.m., throw on your thermal underwear, three pairs of socks, ballet tights and anything else you can squeeze under your jeans and still persuade the zipper to work. You gulp down a hearty breakfast as you grope for binoculars, telescope, flashlight, checklist, gloves, and field guide. All this you do without any help from Reddy Kilowatt and in total silence (the quickest way to become an ex-birder is to wake the entire family preparing for one of these excursions.)

Out of the house by 5 a.m., you meet your birding partner for an hour of owling. This must be done in some secluded spot or at least well away from the homes of "normal" folk. Playing a Screech Owl tape at 5 a.m. can call up more than owls. Owling continues as darkness fades and the world comes alive.

Now off to "scope" for waterfowl. You know of four ponds that will surely add several species to your list; ducks, grebes, and if you're lucky, geese! But you hadn't counted on the fog, so thick you couldn't identify the Loch Ness monster in a mud puddle at 30 feet.

Then off to the world of marshes and thickets and woods and bogs to find some Dicky Birds (sic). Dicky birding is a term used among the birding community to describe land birds, mainly little ones. Just as you spot your first Dicky Bird a Merlin spots her too, and dives in for his breakfast. Apparently your presence has startled the feisty little Carolina Wren and she makes her get-away.

By the time you've scrutinized every limb, leaf, and hollow hole, the fog has lifted and you can clearly see that the legendary ponds are not exactly teeming with waterfowl. Numbers are low but more species are represented than you suspected; just when you figure you haven't missed a thing, 5 Snow Geese settle down on the levee, and you cross the river and pick up two more species.

By the mid-day compilation the list totals 96 species. Most of the probable species have been tallied, now to hunt for the possible, "iffy" and unexpected, plus the Rock Dove which was nowhere to be found in the morning. Except for a Great Egret and a White-crowned Sparrow which have been "staked out" for days, but not yet tallied, no one has any prior knowledge of where to find the hard-to-gets. On many bird counts, this is when enthusiasm wanes, but here the excitement mounts.

One party locates the Great Egret, not exactly where he said he'd be, but the White-crowned Sparrow has taken leave of the count circle altogether. An undaunted birder spots the white eye of a Brewer's Blackbird, perhaps the only one in the area, and with darkness approaching we make one last sweep by the ponds; our car flushes a female Green-winged Teal who's been hugging the bank. Darkness, and one last try for owls. Not a sound but the kuk-kuk of 1100 American Coots.

Hot chili at the home of Jean Freeman precedes the final compilation; anticipation, anxiety, ... the tension seems contagious. One by one the species are tallied, and the group is ecstatic about what has been added since noon. Fish Crow, rare here in winter, American Wigeon, Great Horned Owl, and Horned Lark (a first for the area).

We adjourn with a total of 104, and at 10 p.m. an excited caller reports that two Screech Owls are screeching at Lake Serene. The next day the news filters in from Mammoth Springs of two wild Turkeys who survived Thanksgiving. The final total of 106 species is thoroughly respectable.
--Terrie Fairley.

Jackson: 111 species
 Bill Turcotte: Compiler -- Observers: 27
 January 3, 1981

High count of record was 111 species, 10 over the previous record of 101. (A new high for inland Mississippi CBC's, Ed.) On a near perfect day, 27 observers participated in the count. Unusual species recorded were: 5 Long-billed Marsh Wren, 1 Tree Swallow, Sora, King and Virginia Rail, 2 adult and 2 immature Bald Eagle, 1 Pine Siskin, 13 Great Egret, 70!!! Great Blue Heron, 33!!! Red-tailed Hawk, 46 Bufflehead, 1 Common Golden-eye, 4 Greater Yellowlegs, 2 Red-breasted Nuthatch, 5 Solitary Vireo, 2 Orange-crowned Warbler, 3 Common Yellowthroat, 2 Lincoln Sparrow. The count was compiled at the Wildlife Conservation Department Fisheries Laboratory at the Pearl River Waterfowl Refuge and all parties enjoyed a spaghetti supper and homemade cakes. -- Bill Turcotte.

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Jackson County: 154 species, 20,755 individuals
 Judith Toups: Compiler -- Observers: 22
 December 20, 1980

I took over Larry Gates' Jackson County CBC with the feeling that I couldn't measure up ... Larry's enthusiasm and leadership abilities have long been the mainstay of this coastal count which always leads the state and recently the 3-state reporting area, with totals that swing upward in each succeeding year with better coverage and a good balance of competent observers. My only admonition was that each party should fine-tooth their assigned areas and come in with the birds we should expect to see on the coast in December. Herewith an excerpt from my column: "The alarm sounds at 4 a.m. Outside the sky is hung from east to west with low clouds and the wind is gusting up to 35 mph. Each of us struggles into layers of clothing and takes to the outdoors for owling, railing, and breakfast long before light cracks the day. Annette Duchein and I are at the Pascagoula River Marsh early in the morning. We both have a literal case of cold feet. The wind whips across the marsh grass and stings our eyes. Our survey of the eastern edge of the marsh takes an hour and a half. Birds are scarce, staying low out of the wind. If they make their morning sounds they are carried out of earshot on the gusts which will characterize the day."

"For seven hours we search our area. Five White Pelicans and an American Oystercatcher are silhouetted away on the mudflats. The two Black-necked Stilt are where Bob Chapel said they'd be. An American Bittern flushes out of the reeds. What will be the only Sandhill Crane of the day flies directly overhead and a lone American Avocet whisks its upcurved beak to and fro, far off at the edge of a tidepool."

"We are among the last to reach the mid-day compilation. We learn that John Thompson and Bob Millard have found a White-fronted Goose, and that John Izral and Margaret Halstead have brought in the scarce Canada Goose, (25 of them), Black Duck, Seaside and Sharp-tailed Sparrow."

"Mike Collins and Charliene Roemers have seen 4 Greater Yellowlegs, Ed Cake and Debbie Jennings have found the Mallards and the Fox Sparrows. Ed Harvey has canoed over Graveline Lake and discovered a rare-on-the-coast Common Merganser." (Later dropped from total by compiler for want of written details, Ed.)

"Terrie Fairley and Bob Chapel bring in the usual lone Barn Swallow, and have taken photographs of a could-be Olivaceous Cormorant." (The final word on this species will be Tom Imhof's, the CBC regional editor, and it was not included on the 154 total, Ed.)

"Mal Hodges and Bob Lewis bring in a hefty list including Snow Goose, Brewer's Blackbird and Mottled Duck. Steve Peterson and Carole Pope, both ailing with the flu, have heard the day's only Barred Owl and seen the day's only Turkey. Steve takes two aspirin, folds up his tent, and silently steals away."

"We spend the remainder of the day digging out the Red-breasted Nuthatch, looking over Lesser Scaups for a Greater (we found it) and seeking out a Pintail. The final compilation reaches 154, 2 above the previous 3-state record. Jackson County sets the pace again!"

Compilers comment: The total of 154 is a new high for this 3 state area. What is more important is that it is 154 exclusive of rarities. Besides the birds we figured we should find, and did, there were some common species that eluded us: Black Vulture, Cedar Waxwing, plus some less common species which are known to winter occasionally on the coast: Eared Grebe, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, plegadis sp., Peregrine Falcon, Marbled Godwit, etc. Clearly the Jackson County CBC has the potential to reach 160 or more.-- Judy Toups.

Moon Lake (Lula): 77 species, 6617 individuals
Ben Coffey: Compiler -- Observers: 3
December 31, 1980

Ben reports "Ruddy Duck low: 1 on Moon Lake, 2 on catfish ponds. None on Moon Lake last year but have had up to 6,000." Noteworthy species: Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Natchez: 89 species, 15,006 individuals
Ralph Shields: Compiler -- Observers: 15

Ralph's comments are culled from a newsletter to count participants. "Who could have guessed that we would have done so well? The weather was superb and the participants were great. Without looking back over prior year's records, I think this is the second best count we've had, species wise."

"Coverage this year was also good. I can't think of a single area that was accessible that we didn't seek out."

Ralph used quotes around the word "rarities" because most had been seen on previous counts, but mentions House Finches, Eared Grebes, and Forster's Tern as providing great excitement. The total of 89 species includes two forms of the Red-tailed Hawk, Harlan's and Krider's.

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Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge Count: 84 species
Bill Cross: Compiler -- Observers: 21
December 21, 1980

Twenty-one members of the Oktibbeha Audubon Society recorded 84 species in the Noxubee count area on December 21. This is about the average number listed over the eleven consecutive years since the initial count. An adult male House Finch, an added species for the count, points to the increasing spread of this bird into the southeast. Two adult and one immature Bald Eagles were enjoyed by many of the participants during the day. We were concerned about lower than the usual numbers of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Horned Grebes and Cormorants have been missed in the last 3-4 counts for lack of open water in Bluff Lake. Refuge personnel promise that damaged levees will be repaired before next Christmas; then perhaps they will be back. Nearly 13,000 birds were counted with the most abundant being Common Grackles, Brewer's Blackbirds, Mallards, Coots, and Redwings, in that order. Some of us voted the Bufflehead as winning the beauty contest for the day.-- Bill Cross.

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Sardis Lake: 88 species, 34,955 individuals
Marvin Davis: Compiler -- Observers: 10
December 27, 1980

Marvin commented again on low water level at the reservoir. He lists Greater Yellowlegs (1), Least Sandpiper (10) and Pine Siskin (21) as first CBC records; notes that Green-winged Teal (134), Killdeer (71), Mourning Dove (157) and American Goldfinch (181), Dark-eyed Junco (627) and Field Sparrow (321) were all high recorded numbers, while noting that lows occurred with Gold-crowned Kinglet (7), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (19), and Yellow-rumped Warbler (36).

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Southern Hancock County: 136 species, 10,709 individuals
Judith Toups: Compiler -- Observers: 14
December 27, 1980

Inconsistency is the key word for Hancock County. The 5 year totals, put in graph form, resemble a roller-coaster's ups and downs. Hunting pressure

was at its peak; only 14 individuals of 6 species of pond ducks, few rails, and the natural reluctance of observers to leave the safety of the roadsides, account for what must be considered a less-than representative count of species which normally winter here. Best birds were Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawk (1 ea) a well documented Ferruginous Hawk (Bob Chapel), Whip-poor-will (Bob Lewis), *opornis* sp., Pine Siskin (43) and good sparrows including Grasshopper (1), American Tree (1) Bachman's (1) Clay-colored (1) and Lincoln's (2). Under better circumstances, this count could exceed 150.-- Judy Toups.

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Washington County: 92 species, 92,952 individuals
Edward Alexander: Compiler -- Observers: 33
January 4, 1981

Ed contributes this fine write-up. "The primary success of the Washington County (South) Christmas Count was not necessarily in the variety or rarity of the avian species reported, but rather in the quantity, youth, and enthusiasm of its human participants. Although the number one adversary of any birder, strong wind, was with us all day, we were successful in tracking down 92 species (one short of tying our previous record), and adding one species to our count. The number of participants set a new record by far. We had 33 enthusiastic souls turn out to spend the entire day in 30 degree weather with those continuous 10 mile per hour winds. Afterwards, I received notes from several saying how much they enjoyed it and wondering if we would be doing anything like this in the Spring. Of the 33 participants, 10 were new to the count, roughly two-thirds could be considered "competent," and 10 were under 30 years of age (unusual for a non-college town). We finally have come of age in Washington County in that a new, young nucleus of birders has been formed."

"If any of you were missing ducks this year, especially Mallards and wigeons, they were probably with us. We reported record numbers of each: 36,026 Mallards and 7792 American Wigeons. We reported the first inland Winter record for Christmas Counts (that I can find) of the Semipalmated Plover. Don Crawley, a young biology student at Delta State, spotted the birds. Don has been actively birding for only a year, but has developed a good eye for detail and I have found him to be a very competent observer. Due to the limited years of his experience, Don had not learned that Semipalmated Plovers were not supposed to be here this time of year. So he methodically set out to check every Killdeer for a possible plover. He was successful. His details were very convincing and he even saw another plover the following week. I think the ones of us who have become complacent and regimented in our birding techniques can learn from Don's youthful abandon."

"The final story in Washington County this year was the one about the "ones that got away." Our Vermilion Flycatcher, a regular Winter visitor for 6 of the last 9 years, was observed in his usual spot at Lake Jackson several times prior to the Count, but failed to show on Count Day. Also, the Friday following the Count, Ellie Ganier invited me to Hollandale to try to locate a reported Burrowing Owl. We found him in a wide open field,

freshly plowed, using road culverts for refuge. Unfortunately we were 5 days late."

"Our Christmas Count this year was, as always, a success. In addition to the contribution we all make each year to the cause of science, we feel our Count was a vehicle through which new serious birders were developed. But most of all, we had fun." -- Ed Alexander.

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Vicksburg: 95 species, about 33,000 individuals
Louis Cashman and Hal Moore: Co-compilers -- Observers: 21
December 28, 1980

Louis writes "You're right, we did start a Christmas Bird Count in Vicksburg this year. Hal and I were well satisfied with our first effort and plan to conduct it each year. Bill Turcotte and his wife came over and Ed and Ginger Alexander came down from Greenville. John Thompson had planned to come but phoned me the night before that he was sick. I asked Steve Peterson but he declined saying that he was going to participate in one on the coast the day before and could not make ours." And from the Vicksburg Evening Post, this: "The local count, although not including any rare or extremely unusual birds, did turn up some birds not usually seen here at this time of year, including White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Osprey, Eastern Kingbird, (wow!, Ed.) and Gray Catbird..."