

MOS NEWSLETTER

Spring 1989

Volume 34, No. 2

MOS Spring 1989 Meeting: Natchez, 5-7 May

The Southwest MS Chapter of the Wildlife Rehabilitation and Nature Preservation Society (WRANPS) is the host for this meeting, which is headquartered at the Natchez Eola Hotel, the site of the banquet.

Scheduled activities are as follows:

Friday, 5 May: 7-9:30 p.m. Welcome social and birding strategy session. At Selma, the home of Mr. & Mrs. John Williams. Directions: From Natchez, take U.S. Hwy. 61 North all the way through Washington. After crossing St. Catherine's Creek Bridge, take the third paved right at Tom's Pic & Pay grocery and follow the arrows. An optics distributor will also display his wares, and answer any questions we have about binoculars and scopes.

Saturday, 6 May: 7 a.m. until. . . . Adams County birding exploration. This area is terra incognita for MS birders, and whatever we find will be interesting. For those unable to attend the Friday night strategy session, a group will leave from the Eola Hotel (see map).

2:15 p.m. Viewing of china painted by J. J. Audubon at Green Leaves, the home of Mr. & Mrs. George Morrison, Jr., 303 South Rankin, at the corners of Washington, Rankin, and Pine (see map).

3-4 p.m. J. J. Audubon slide presentation, Sim Callon, speaker. Venue: Grand Village of the Natchez Indians Auditorium, 400 Jefferson Davis Blvd., off U.S. Hwy. 61 (see map).

7-10 p.m. MOS Banquet, Natchez Eola Hotel, 110 North Pearl. Cost: \$12/person (see reservation form). Banquet menu: cream of broccoli soup, spinach salad, southern fried chicken (New Orleans style), rice pilaf, glazed carrots with dill and honey, fresh bread, peach melba, tea and coffee. After the business meeting, our banquet speaker, Genevieve Tharp Little, will talk about her wildlife rehabilitation work with WRANPS.

Sunday, 7 May: 8 a.m. until. . . . WRANPS open house & social at the WRANPS facility, 250 Kaiser Lake Road, off U.S. Hwy. 61 between Washington and the Airport (better directions will be given at the banquet). We will be able to handle and study "patients" at the facility. Coffee, soft drinks, and snacks will be served.

(1989 Spring Meeting announcement continued)

Sunday, 7 May: (continued)

8-10:30 a.m. Visit to the local Bald Eagle nest (weather permitting); in Jefferson County, out from Church Hill (meeting place to be announced at the banquet).

Probable meeting of the MOS Records Committee, although no formal announcement has been made.

Reservations should be made for the Banquet and the Audubon china viewing by 4 May 1989, using the reservation form included in this newsletter.

Accommodations

The Natchez Eola Hotel will offer a special rate to MOS members of \$40 per night, single or double, or \$75 per night for a suite (bedroom and sitting room).

For reservations call: (800) 821-3721 or (601) 445-6000.

Other motels in Natchez (including nationwide toll-free WATS reservation line and local phone of the Natchez motel) are as follows:

Best Western Motel, (800) 528-1234, (601) 442-1691,
Days Inn, (800) 325-2525, (601) 445-8291,
Ramada Inn, (800) 272-6232, (601) 446-6311,
Holiday Inn, (800) 465-4329, (601) 442-3686,
Scottish Inn, (800) 251-1962, (601) 442-9141.

Other activities

There are many things for non-birding spouses and families to do in and within 15-20 minutes of Natchez. The Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and Jefferson Military College are museums. The Natchez State Park offers camping, fishing and picnic areas. Along the Natchez Trace are the Emerald Indian Mound and Mt. Locust Inn. Duncan Park has golfing and tennis facilities. Natchez abounds with antique shops, and Natchez-Under-the-Hill and the Canal Street Depot offer quaint shops.

How to get to Natchez

Take U.S. Highways 61, 98, or 84 into Natchez. The Trace is also nice, but ends 9 miles north of the city.

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Summaries of Mississippi Christmas Bird Counts, 1988-89

Following are highlights from some of our state's Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) for the past season. I did not receive information for the Arkabutla Lake and Washington Co. CBCs. The compilers of these may send information for inclusion in the next newsletter.

Church Hill (Genevieve Little, compiler)---29 Dec.; 28.5 party-hours; 179.6 party-miles (4.3 on foot, 175.3 by car); 7 observers; 62 species; 3,182 individuals.

Although the species total for this count continues to climb, the total individuals dropped sharply this year. This could be due to low numbers of starlings and blackbirds; also no House Sparrows were recorded. The compiler wonders if last year's drought is responsible. Totals of note: 14 Red-shouldered Hawks, 26 Red-headed Woodpeckers, and 159 bluebirds.

Grenada (Marvin Davis, compiler)---20 Dec.; 46 party-hours; 192 party-miles (19 on foot, 173 by car); 15 observers; 105 species; 22,063 individuals.

A Mountain Plover, new for MS and the best MS bird of the season, was seen on the count (it was discovered during pre-count scouting; the lake level was very low, exposing square miles of good Mountain Plover habitat). Two other species were new to the count: Greater Scaup and Com. Ground-Dove. Other interesting birds included Eared Grebe, Merlin, King Rail, W. Sandpiper, and Lincoln's Sparrow. Some high totals were 156 Great Blue Herons, 17 Forster's Terns, and 56 Tufted Titmice. Even in bad years, this count does well!

Hattiesburg (Terrie & Larry Gates, compilers)---28 Dec.; 62.5 party-hours; 242 party-miles (27 on foot, 210 by car); 14 observers; 108 species; 8360 individuals.

Good birds turned up include 11 Eared Grebes, American Bittern, 15 Blue-winged Teal, Merlin, White-eyed Vireo, and Lincoln's Sparrow. Good numbers of kinglets were found (133 GCK, 115 RCK), but 320 Yellow-rumped Warblers seems low. This may be the farthest south in the state that House Finches are wintering in good numbers; 18 were seen.

Jackson (Bill Turcotte, compiler)---31 Dec.; 86 species.

Comments from Steve Peterson: "This was the lowest species total in some years, due to several things. First, the weather: heavy rain all morning and some in the afternoon. I estimate our party lost 3 good hours of birding time. Fog hampered long range viewing. Second, we were short two parties, so we had reduced coverage, some of it in usually productive areas. Third, area development (houses) and habitat destruction were problems,

(CBC summaries continued)

as in the hedgerows where we always found White-crowned Sparrows. Temp. remained in the 50's most of the wet day. Some good things---this was the first time we had Blue-winged Teal on the count, and 2 pintail were nice. We got woodcock for the first time in several years, and a male and female yellowthroat at close range were nice."

Jackson Co. (Terrie & Larry Gates, compilers)---31 Dec.; 68.5 party-hours; 462.5 party-miles (31.5 on foot, 431 by car); 12 miles and 5 hours by boat; 19 observers; 144 species; 15,533 individuals.

Rain can certainly ruin a count, but thick fog is almost as bad, especially when your area is to be covered mostly by scope. Your editor was assigned Pascagoula River marsh for this count---an exercise in frustration. Still, good birds were seen (although not be me!). Tennessee and Bay-breasted warblers were excellent finds. A Bald Eagle and an Osprey were nice, the former rarely seen this far east on the coast. Other goodies: a ground-dove, 2 woodcock, and a Henslow's Sparrow. The fog did something for the screech-owls, since 31 were recorded!

Moon Lake (Lula) (Lula C. & Ben B. Coffey, Jr., compilers)---27 Dec.; 4 observers; 61 species; 2665 individuals.

The species total fell by 10 from last year, but the number of individuals is one-sixth that of the previous count, similar to that of two years ago. A total of 71 grackles was seen this year, down from over 8,000 last year. The most notable species was Cattle Egret, with 3 seen.

Natchez (Ralph Shields, compiler)---26 Dec.; 41.25 party-hours; 200 party-miles (14.5 on foot, 194.5 by car); 10 observers; 79 species; 86,600 individuals.

This count was a study in contrasts. While only 4 species of ducks were recorded, 1 of those was Common Merganser (6 of 'em!). No Solitary Vireos were counted, but an astounding Yellow-throated Vireo was recorded. Another rarity seen was a Golden Eagle. A total of 82 Red-tailed Hawks was high for the count. While great numbers of Lapland Longspurs were seen in upper reaches of the Mississippi Delta this past winter, the 120 reported for Natchez sounds like an exceptional count.

Noxubee NWR (Ray Weeks & Faye Swan, compilers)---17 Dec.; 99.5 party-hours; 365 party-miles (31 on foot, 334 by car); 28 observers; 96 species; 23,543 individuals.

Notable species included a Cooper's Hawk and 2 LeConte's

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(CBC summaries continued)

Sparrows. Also seen were an adult Bald Eagle and a Bonaparte's Gull. Good numbers of Double-crested Cormorants (420) and Mallard (3,493) were counted. This count probably boasted more observers than any other MS CBC this year.

Sardis Lake (Marvin Davis, compiler)---22 Dec.; 50 party-hours; 202 party-miles (17 on foot, 185 by car); 13 observers; 100 species; 18,316 individuals.

House Finch was recorded for the first time on this count. Also seen was a Sedge Wren, rare for the area. While high numbers of robins (760), Yellow-rumped Warblers (263), Song Sparrows (263), and Swamp Sparrows (187) were recorded, "low" numbers were noted for 6 species. These include only 9 Red-tailed Hawks and less than 2,600 grackles. Total number of individuals was almost half of last year's total. Early morning fog and later high winds may have hurt this count.

Southern Hancock Co. (Judith Toups, compiler)---28 Dec.; 21 observers; 151 species.

A decent complement of birders and good organization led this count to its second-highest total ever, and the highest count for the state the second year running. Rarities seen: Red-throated Loon, gannets (2nd year in a row), Buff-bellied and Rufous hummingbirds, Prairie Warbler, and Dickcissel. Oystercatchers were found again this year, and a single Sharp-tailed Sparrow was seen by the boat party. An astounding half-million Tree Swallows were seen.

Sumner (Genevieve Little, compiler)---23 Dec.; 11.5 party-hours; 88.5 party-miles (1 on foot, 87.5 by car); 3 observers; 75 species; 21,292 individuals.

Individuals were about equal, but total species dropped by 4 from last year's total. Fog and light rain hampered birding somewhat. Birds of note: Osprey, Cooper's Hawk, Orange-crowned Warbler, LeConte's & Lincoln's sparrows, and W. Meadowlarks. White-crowned Sparrows totaled a healthy 122 birds. Some oxbows full of water the previous year were virtually dry this year, due to the drought; duck watching suffered.

Vicksburg (Hal Moore, compiler)---17 Dec.; 17 observers; 89 species; 11,290 individuals.

Although fine weather prevailed, total species dropped by 11 from last year's total, reflecting generally poor birding all over. Notable were 55 white pelicans, a Little Blue Heron, and an Anhinga. Blackbirds, especially grackles, were scarce (as at

(CBC summaries continued)

Church Hill). Hal writes, "No Purple Finches or siskins...." Both were recorded on MS CBCs this year, but they were generally absent from the state this season.

From the Editor:

The Memphis chapter of TOS is planning a birding trip to Kenya in 1989. Dates: 1-15 November. The cost will be \$2998 inclusive from New York. International Expeditions of Birmingham is handling arrangements and will donate \$100 per traveler to the chapter. Fifteen persons are needed to reserve space in order to confirm the trip. The trip will be in association with the East Africa Ornithol. Society, which says we can expect 300 species in 15 days, perhaps 400 since the European migrants will be in. Anyone interested in the trip should contact Van Harris, 435 McNeil St., Memphis, TN 38112, ph. (901) 274-1427.

Gracious letters of thanks were sent by WRANPS to MOS for our donations of \$100 each to their chapters. We heard from the Gulf Coast, Jackson, and Southwest chapters.

If an "E" appears after your name on the address label of this newsletter, you have not paid 1988 dues, and will not receive Kites for that year until dues are received by the Treasurer.

On Submitting Details for Mississippi Bird Rareties by Terence Schiefer

In the past, the MOS Records Committee (MOSRC) has concerned itself chiefly with the upkeep of the state bird list; once a species was documented in the state, additional records were not reviewed. As non-documented records of rare birds accumulated it became obvious that much valuable ornithological information was being lost. There is no way to evaluate records of rare birds without details.

The MOSRC is attempting to rectify this situation by requesting details on all sightings of species which are of casual or accidental occurrence in Mississippi. These species, which have been reported 7 or fewer of the past 10 years, are listed below.

Having these records on file will allow researchers now as well as those 100 years from now some means of evaluating the validity of rare bird records in Mississippi.

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Following is a list of rare birds reported in MS requiring details. Note that not all species on this list are on the official state list.

Red-throated Loon	Thayer's Gull
Pacific Loon	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Red-necked Grebe	Glaucous Gull
Western Grebe	Great Black-backed Gull
Sooty Shearwater	Black-legged Kittiwake
Audubon's Shearwater	Sabine's Gull
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	Roseate Tern
Masked Booby	Bridled Tern
Great Cormorant	Sooty Tern
Olivaceous Cormorant	Brown Noddy
Glossy Ibis	Band-tailed Pigeon
White-faced Ibis	Snowy Owl
Roseate Spoonbill	Burrowing Owl
Fulvous Whistling-Duck	Long-eared Owl
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	Northern Saw-whet Owl
Tundra Swan	Lesser Nighthawk
Ross' Goose	Black-chinned Hummingbird
Brant	Rufous Hummingbird
Cinnamon Teal	Buff-bellied Hummingbird
Eurasian Wigeon	Ivory-billed Woodpecker
King Eider	Western Wood-Pewee
Black Scoter	Alder Flycatcher
Northern Goshawk	Willow Flycatcher
Harris' Hawk	Say's Phoebe
Swainson's Hawk	Ash-throated Flycatcher
Ferruginous Hawk	Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher
Rough-legged Hawk	Gray Kingbird
Golden Eagle	Cave Swallow
Crested Caracara	Mountain Bluebird
Yellow Rail	Townsend's Solitaire
Black Rail	Sprague's Pipit
Limpkin	Bell's Vireo
Whooping Crane	Black-capped Vireo
Mountain Plover	Black-whiskered Vireo
Long-billed Curlew	Bachman's Warbler
Hudsonian Godwit	Black-throated Gray Warbler
Purple Sandpiper	Townsend's Warbler
Ruff	Grace's Warbler
Red-necked Phalarope	Connecticut Warbler
Red Phalarope	Painted Redstart
Pomarine Jaeger	Western Tanager
Parasitic Jaeger	Black-headed Grosbeak
Little Gull	Lazuli Bunting
Common Black-headed Gull	Green-tailed Towhee
California Gull	American Tree Sparrow

(Submitting details continued)

Rare bird list continued:

Lark Bunting	Snow Bunting
Henslow's Sparrow	Western Meadowlark
Harris' Sparrow	Bronzed Cowbird
Smith's Longspur	Red Crossbill

What to do if you see a bird on this list:

1. Take field notes. Most of us tend not to take field notes, but they can be very convincing documentation if done well. A detailed description or even a sketch of the bird should be made before your field guide is consulted. Learn the list of rare birds. When you see one, it's time to get out the pen and paper!
2. Try to get a photograph. Note that details should be written even for rare birds that have been photographed. This is necessary so that the circumstances surrounding the sighting are not lost.
3. Get as many birders as possible to see the bird. The more individuals confirming your identification, the better. They should write up details, also, but independently.
4. Write up the details of the sighting. A rare bird report form is included in this newsletter, but you may use any form or no form at all, as long as the pertinent details are included. It is important to always include a section on how you excluded similar species of birds from consideration.
5. Send your documentation to the records committee. Enclose a copy of your field notes, your rare bird report form, and a photograph (if you have one) to:

Steve Peterson
 Chairman, MOSRC
 5128 Reddock Dr.
 Jackson, MS 39211

You may also give it to any committee member, and they will forward it to Steve for you. Never send originals, but only photocopies of notes and details, and slide or photo duplicates. Keep originals for your personal files.

The other MOSRC members are Ed Alexander, Marvin Davis, Malcolm Hodges, Jerry Jackson, Joe McGee, Hal Moore, Terry Schiefer, Judy Toups, and Bill Turcotte.

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BEHAVIOR: