

MOS Newsletter

Spring 1990

Volume 35, Number 2

MOS 1990 Spring Meeting: Pascagoula, April 20-22

The MOS will meet in Jackson County this spring to put a new twist on the usual Gulf Coast meeting. Our base of operations will be the LaFont Inn, located on U.S. 90 just west of Singing River Hospital, Pascagoula. Our schedule will be as follows:

FRIDAY, 7-9 p.m.:

Welcome social, in the Hospitality Suite, Rm. 176, LaFont Inn. Refreshments will be provided by members of the Mississippi Coast Audubon Society.

SATURDAY, 7:30 a.m.:

The research vessel Bill Demoran departs Gulf Coast Research Lab in Ocean Springs for a morning's birding on Horn Island. The boat will only accomodate 18 passengers, so we will make either one or two trips based on the number of reservations. Arrangements will be made on Friday evening if two trips are necessary (some of you may get to sleep in!). Reservations are required, and payment (\$10) must be made in advance (see form provided in newsletter). Please mail reservations no later than 31 March. This trip will be cancelled in case of bad weather. We will stay about three to five hours on the island, and hopefully all be back by about 2 p.m.

NOTE: Horn Island is designated wilderness, and is part of Gulf Islands National Seashore; it is a wonderful place, and you should take advantage of this opportunity if you have never been there. There is plenty to see and enjoy on the Island, but birding there can be dull in spring, especially in mild weather with south winds. Weather which makes for good birding (i.e., a strong front with rain) will cause the boat trip to be cancelled (Catch 22!). Other words of caution: the bugs can be ruthless, the sun can be relentless, and getting about can be tiresome---four hours of walking in sand is a workout. If the tide is right, we will use the Park Service pier; otherwise, we will have to ferry people to the island in a skiff. Transferring to and from a skiff can be trying for some, especially in choppy seas. Please be sensible and don't take the trip if any of these things sounds difficult for you.

For those who don't plan to take the Horn Island trip (or for everyone if the boat trip is cancelled due to weather), we will meet at 7:30 a.m. in front of the LaFont Inn for birding trips. We should have enough leaders for every car, or at most every two cars. We will concentrate on Jackson County hot spots such as Pascagoula River marsh, Big Point, Pascagoula River Wildlife Management Area, etc.; however, if some of you cannot resist the allure of Hancock County, we can make arrangements on Friday night.

(MOS Spring Meeting continued)

SATURDAY, 3 p.m.:

Tour of Walter Anderson's cottage, Shearwater Pottery, Ocean Springs. Mary Anderson Pickard (Walter's daughter) will lead a tour of this cottage, where Anderson painted many of the walls with various murals. A must-see for anyone interested in Anderson's art, and a fitting tie-in with the Island trip, where he did much of his work. There should also be plenty of time for browsing in the Pottery's showroom, before we have to get back for...

6:30 p.m.:

Banquet, Garden Room, LaFont Inn. We will be served a private buffet of seafood casserole, fried fish, chicken, choice of vegetables, three salads, assorted desserts, and tea or coffee. Cost is \$10 per person, which includes tax and gratuity. Please pay in advance (see reservation form).

Following the meal, a business meeting will be held. After the meeting, Mini Nagendran, a graduate student at North Dakota State University, will give a program concerning her work as surrogate mother to a group of Mississippi Sandhill Cranes.

SUNDAY morning:

Additional birding trips and meeting of the MOS Records Committee, to be arranged on Saturday night.

MEALS:

Breakfasts will be on your own. The LaFont Inn restaurant opens at 6 a.m. on Saturday and 7 a.m. on Sunday, and they will probably have a buffet. Fast food restaurants and a doughnut shop are located on Highway 90 in Pascagoula.

Box lunches will be available for Saturday field trips. The cost will be \$2.50 per person, payable in advance (see reservation form). Lunches will include a sandwich, chips, brownie or cookies, and a drink.

ACCOMODATIONS:

The LaFont Inn is blocking 15 rooms for meeting participants (please make reservations for blocked rooms by 6 April). Costs are \$39 single occupancy per night and \$44 double occupancy per night (two double beds). Queen- and king-size beds are available for \$48 and \$59, respectively. The Inn has been recently remodeled, and all rooms have complimentary coffee, spring water, a small refrigerator, and an amenities basket. For reservations call toll-free:

In state: (800) 821-3668

Out of state: (800) 647-6077

or write: LaFont Inn, Hwy. 90 E., Pascagoula, MS 39567.

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(MOS Spring Meeting continued)

Other hotels in Pascagoula include:

Best Western Pascagoula (800) 528-1234 or 475-5000
Hampton Inn (800) 426-7866 (HAMPTON) or 475-2477
Rienzi Inn 769-6200 (call collect for reservations)
King's Inn Motel 762-8110
Economy Inn 762-9414

DIRECTIONS:

The Best Western and Hampton are at the I-10 Hwy. 63 exit (exit 69); all other motels mentioned are on Hwy. 90. To get to Hwy. 90, the main east-west drag in Pascagoula, take Hwy 63 south from I-10. Turn right (west) on Hwy. 90 toward motels.

To get to Ocean Springs from Pascagoula, go west on I-10 to exit 57, or take Hwy. 90 west. Follow green signs marked "Gulf Coast Research Laboratory" from Hwy. 90 in Ocean Springs. For Shearwater Pottery, from Hwy. 90 turn south at Vermont Ave. in Ocean Springs (look for a Winn-Dixie, a Gulf Station, and a Taco Bell at the intersection). Follow the Shearwater Pottery signs with the Black Skimmer (called "shearwater" colloquially). Allow at least 30 minutes travel time from Pascagoula to Ocean Springs.

If you have any questions please call a member of the local committee: Chita Cassibry (875-3698), Alice Duckett (875-4559), Marion Fahnestock (875-4150) or JoRee Pennell (875-4138). Your Newsletter editor is also a member of the local committee, but for reasons detailed below is having his phone disconnected!

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Oktibbeha Audubon is sponsoring a breeding bird atlas for Oktibbeha County, and atlasing begins this year. They need experienced birders. If you can help this spring or summer for a day or two (or four!), call Terry Schiefer at 324-3748 or Margaret Copeland at 323-1445.

Your Newsletter editor has accepted a position training Peace Corps fisheries volunteers in Liberia from March through December. I regret having to resign the editorship, and have thoroughly enjoyed serving the MOS in this capacity. I would like to hear from you while overseas; my address will be

Dave Ruple of Ocean Springs has graciously volunteered to be the new editor of the MOS Newsletter, beginning with the Summer 1990 issue. Send contributions to Dave at 5725 Lee St., Ocean Springs, MS 39564, or call at 872-3020.

Now is the time to pay your 1990 dues. Please send them to the treasurer. Her address and dues amounts are on page 8.

Summaries of Mississippi Christmas Bird Counts, 1989-1990

Following are brief tidbits from most of the state's counts from this past season. The counts for which I have no information are Arkabutla Lake, Moon Lake, Natchez, Sidon and Vicksburg. The Sidon CBC is a new circle compiled by Randy Roberts of Greenwood, and includes Matthews Brake Nat. Wildlife Refuge.

Church Hill (Genevieve Tharp Little, compiler)---27 Dec.; 16.5 party-hours; 171.7 party-miles (all by car); 3 observers in 2 parties; 58 species; 1804 individuals.

A drop in species from last year's high of 62 might be from either the very cold weather before the count (all water frozen, despite a high of 70 degrees F on count day) or a drop in observers from last year's seven. No rarities were seen, and species numbers were generally at or below average, judging from the lack of boldfaced numbers.

Grenada (Marvin Davis, compiler)---21 Dec.; 45 party-hours; 273 party-miles (18 on foot, 255 by car); 13 observers in 5-6 parties; 100 species; 16,452 individuals.

Several species counts were all-time highs for this 23-year-old count, including Am. Black Duck, 63, Bonaparte's Gull, 566, Horned Lark, 60, and Song Sparrow, 325. Conversely, 3 Turkey Vultures was the lowest count ever for that species. This is the third consecutive year this count has reached the century mark. Congratulations, Marvin!

Hattiesburg (Terrie & Larry Gates, compilers)---30 Dec.; 106 species; 1067 individuals.

Sora was apparently a first for the count. Other good birds include a Common Merganser seen count week, and a count-week Prothonotary Warbler at the Gates' feeder---not many of those over-winter!

Jackson County (Larry & Terrie Gates, compilers)---16 Dec.; 69 party-hours; 202.5 party-miles (28.5 on foot, 142 by car, 32 by boat); 18 observers in 8-9 parties; 151 species; 11,695 individuals.

Despite very cold temperatures and fairly strong northerly winds, this count turned in its best list in a few years. Some good rarities were found, such as Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, staked out by Peter Range the day before the count. More astounding were two Horned Larks for a first MS Coastal record. Unfortunately, we coastal birders forgot to call the Gates and tell them the bird I misidentified as a Western Tanager at the Cassibrys' feeder was in fact a Northern Oriole (thanks, Judy and Terry!). It got turned in as the former on the count week list.

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(CBC summaries continued)

Jackson (Bill Turcotte, compiler)---30 Dec.; 106 species.

This count tied Hattiesburg for the top inland CBC. Despite some problems with fog, the weather was warm, and the rain held off most of the day. Good birds include an Oldsquaw (two were seen after the count). Also, a Lesser Black-backed Gull was found on the Reservoir, for a second upstate record.

Noxubee NWR (Terry Schiefer, compiler)---16 Dec.; 98 species.

The usual high number of observers turned in the usual near-100 total. Several birds on the list were boldfaced by the compiler: Greater White-fronted Goose, Redhead, Cooper's Hawk, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. This on a "cold, cold day!"

Sardis Lake (Marvin Davis, compiler)---31 Dec.; 52 party-hours; 210 party-miles (17 on foot, 193 by car); 11 observers in 5-6 parties; 96 species; 47,165 individuals.

Waterfowl were most of the news: an Oldsquaw and 18 Com. Mergansers were rare, and all-time high counts of Canada Goose (8715) and Wood Duck (70) were present. While over 23,000 Com. Grackles were seen, only 58 Mourning Doves could be found.

Southern Hancock County (Judith Toups, compiler)---28 Dec.; 157 species.

Once again this count takes top honors with the highest species total in the state; the compiler believes the 170s are in the cards. The crackerjack team of G. Morgan and M. Davis found two of the best birds: a Western Tanager (a real one!), and a Clay-colored Sparrow. Also found were Eared Grebe (offshore), Short-eared Owl, and Lincoln's Sparrow.

Sumner (Genevieve Tharp Little, compiler)---2 Jan.; 9 party-hours; 111 party-miles (1 on foot, 110 by car); 3 observers in 1 party; 69 species; 14,379 individuals.

An Oldsquaw was the only rarity found. Western Meadowlarks could not be found this year---few meadowlarks at all were present. Bird numbers were generally down from last year, although 669 Lapland Longspurs may be an all-time high for the state.

Washington County (south) (Ed Alexander, compiler)---31 Dec.; 98 species.

Some of the good birds found include 3 Greater Scaup, a Golden Eagle, and 2 Sedge Wrens. Over 21,000 Mallards were counted, but only 4 Lapland Longspurs could be found (they were all at Sumner!). Rain and cold weather hampered birding for part of the day.

[It's almost time to hang out the hummingbird feeders again, so here's a little piece to "wet" your appetites for these very popular birds.---Ed.]

Bathing Hummingbirds---William H. Turcotte

The first time I saw a hummingbird bathing was many years ago while in my yard watering flowers. The water hose was temporarily laid on the ground with a fine spray of water. After a short pause doing other yard work I looked toward the hose nozzle and there was a rainbow in the spray with a male rubythroat flying inverted arcs through the spray, then preening itself on nearby shrubs. It repeated this several times before flying off.

Several years ago in my garden in Richland I was sprinkling a row of fall English peas and a hummingbird flew into the spray, and, while hovering, caught drops of water in its mouth. After alighting on a weed stalk and preening itself it flew back and forth through the spray and resumed preening nearby.

On 18 September 1989 I was using a rotating sprinkler to water two rows of greens. As I sat on a stool watching the sprinkler a female or immature flew into the spray then sat on the garden fence and preened itself. It returned to the spray where water was falling on an adjacent strawberry bed. While clinging to the central strawberry leaf it bathed itself repeatedly in the trough of the wet leaf. The same act was repeated several times on different leaves. The bird sat on the fence preening less than six feet from where I was sitting. It also drank from water drops clinging from needles on a pine limb hanging above the garden fence.

Such observations of the behavior of an otherwise common species can be rewarding to the observer, as these infrequent sightings cited above have been to me.



RESERVATION FORM---1990 MOS SPRING MEETING

Names & addresses of participants:

Please reserve: ___ place(s) on the Horn Island boat trip
 @ \$10 per person
 ___ box lunch(es) for Saturday @ \$2.50 per
 lunch
 ___ place(s) at the banquet @ \$10 per person

Send reservation form and check by 31 March to:

Chita Cassibry
3243 Nottingham Rd.
Ocean Springs, MS 39564 phone 875-3698

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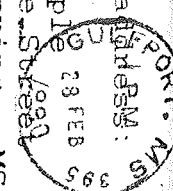
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All those interested in Mississippi bird life are invited to
Join the MOS. MOS dues: Life, \$100; Sustaining, \$20;
Individual, \$10; Family, \$15; Junior/Golden Age, individual \$4,
family \$8; Subscribing (institutions) \$10. Send dues to the
Treasurer.

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Ocean Springs, MS 39564



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