

MOS NEWSLETTER

Spring 1991

Volume 36, Number 1

MOS ANNUAL SPRING MEETING TO BE HELD AT STARKVILLE, MAY 17-19:
The Oktibbeha County Breeding Bird Atlas

The Mississippi Ornithological Society will convene for Spring 1991 at Starkville, MS, with the Oktibbeha Audubon Society acting as the locality hosts and hostesses. President Terry Schiefer has announced plans for the meeting on the weekend of May 17th to 19th, 1991, which will focus on the Oktibbeha County Breeding Bird Atlas Project. The base of operations will be the Regal Inn on Hwy. 82 in Starkville.

Since most MOSers are unfamiliar with Breeding Bird Atlases, some explanation is in order. Oktibbeha County has been divided into 64 blocks of about 10 square miles each, each of which will be surveyed to determine what species breed there. Atlasing is a lot of fun since you will not only be identifying birds, but also looking for breeding behavior. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that each of your sightings, even those of Bluejays and Mockingbirds, is useful and important information. Your atlasing will take you into areas that have never been birded, offering a real possibility of some exciting discoveries. For example, last year's atlas work yielded the first nesting of Cedar Waxwing for Mississippi.

Each of you is more than capable of surveying an atlas block. Remember, even if you can find only 20 species of birds in your block, those 20 represent new information that wouldn't have been available without your participation.

Since atlasing is best conducted by a small group of people, we will aim to organize atlas parties of no more than two (good) to four (O.K.) people. In order that we may best organize parties and assign blocks that suit your needs, please supply the information indicated on the meeting registration form.

Our weekend schedule will be as follows:

Friday evening, 6:30-8:00

We will meet at the Regal Inn for socializing; snacks and drinks will be provided by the Oktibbeha Audubon Society.

Friday evening, 8:00-9:00

Terry Schiefer will conduct a training session that will explain how the atlasing process works. It is very important that you attend this session so that you may know what you are to be doing on Saturday. (If you cannot attend but plan on atlasing on Saturday, please call Terry at 324-3748 as soon as possible for special instructions.) The session will also involve assigning atlasing parties and blocks

Saturday a.m., bright and early

Each atlas party will explore its assigned block to discover what species are breeding there.

Saturday evening, 6:30 p.m.

The annual spring dinner and MOS business meeting, atlas wrap-up, and evening program will be held at the Regal Inn restaurant. The cost for the Dinner and program will be \$12.00 per person. We will be served a chicken entree, salad, potato and dessert. Following dinner we will conduct our business meeting and atlas wrap-up. Our after-dinner speaker will be Bob Ford of the Tennessee Department of Conservation and current president of the Tennessee Ornithological Society. Bob will present a program on "Birds of Bottomland Hardwood Forests" based on his studies and discoveries during a recent 3-year research project on river bottom habitats in Tennessee.

Sunday morning

You may wish to continue atlasing your block and/or visit some of the local birding spots described in Miss. Kite, 16(1), July 1986.

MEALS: Breakfasts and lunches will be "on your own."

ACCOMMODATIONS:

A block of rooms has been reserved at the Regal Inn at the flat rate of \$34.56 per room (incl. tax). Call 1-800-748-3075 for reservations, which must be made before May 10th; ask for Nancy or David and mention the MOS meeting.

Summaries of Mississippi Christmas Bird Counts, 1990-91

Following are highlights from all of the CBC's that have been made available to me. I regret that all could not be included. Compilers, remember the Newsletter Editor next fall for your CBC date(s) and afterwards for your results, please!

Arkabutla Lake (Rob Peebles, compiler)---29 Dec.; cloudy, windy, 60-72°; 14 observers in 4-6 parties; **99** species; 16,370 individuals.

In its 10th year (is that possible? my how the time flies!), this count had its best species total yet. New species to the count were: Lesser Yellowlegs (1), Forster's Tern (1), Lapland Longspur (7), Brewer's Blackbird (7), and Western Meadowlark (1). Species showing extra high nos. were: N. Pintail (202), N. Shoveler (1207), Killdeer (84), Red-bel. Woodpecker (112), Horned Lark (272), Ca. Wren (109), Wht.-cr. Sparrow (**88**), E. Meadowlark (311), House Finch (261). Fine work.

Church Hill (Genevieve Tharp, compiler)---2 Jan.; cloudy, foggy, rainy; 38-42°; 3 observers in 2 parties; 55 species; 5340 individuals.

Best weather of the day, until 9 a.m., was "a steady gentle

rain"! species

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rain"! All downhill from there; thus, no surprise that no unusual species were turned up. Single House and Purple Finches.

Grenada (Marvin Davis, compiler)---Overcast with periods of moderate to heavy rain, fog over lake; 53-57°; 16 observers in 1-7 parties; 109 species; 16,797 individuals.

This 24th year saw 2 new species--Osprey (3) and Barn Owl (3); exceptional nos. included: Great Blue Heron (497), Forster's Tern (30), Mourning Dove (256), Fish Crow (58), N. Cardinal (191) and Pine Siskin (37). Species total excelled previous high of 107; in better weather would have had more than one party in the field to end of day, and would have added Turkey Vulture for 110! Everyone participated in Barn Owl sightings.

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge (Terry Schiefer, compiler)---16 Dec.; cloudy, light wind; 50-55°; 15 observers in 7 parties; 92 species (plus 6 in the week); 26,222 individuals.

New or unusual species: Gr. Wht-fr. Goose (1), Golden Eagle (1), Horned Lark (25), Red Crossbill (12); exceptional nos.: 403 D-c. Cormorant, 464 Hooded Merganser, 46 Ring-billed Gull, 9 Gr. Horned Owl, 86 Am. Pipit. This count had about the best weather of the year, and scored well on birds also; see 2 boldfaces above! Must have covered fields more this year, but what about LeConte's Sparrow?

Sardis Lake (Marvin Davis, compiler)---27 Dec.; overcast with rain all day, fog over lake, light to moderate wind; 41-46°; 11 observers in 1-6 parties, but low party-hours because of weather; 90 species, (7 more in the week); 10,736 individuals.

One nice Merlin was a 1st for the count. Species with exceptional nos. were D-cr. Cormorant (55), Gr. Wht-fr. Goose (26), Snow Goose (212), Green-winged Teal (800), Chipping Sparrow (70), Dark-eyed Junco (713). Remarkable to hit 90 with such miserable weather.

Sidon (Philip Barbour, compiler)---17 Dec.; cloudy with light rain to partly clear, light wind; 55-65°; 11 observers in 2 parties; 84 species; 8188 individuals.

D-cr. Cormorant (300), 183 Great Blue Heron, 22 Great Egret, 10 sp. ducks, incl. 658 Canvasback, 233 L. Scaup and 300 Ruddy Duck, 1 Bald Eagle, 3 House Wren, 1 Gray Catbird, 1 House Finch. Good waterbirds. Great recruiting job, Philip!

Southern Hancock County (Judy Toups, compiler)---cloudy, foggy, windy; 43-64°; 24 observers in ? parties, 60.5 party-hr; 157 species; 41,738 individuals.

Noteworthy species and/or numbers include: Brown Pelican (23), Anhinga (1), Am. and Least Bittern (1 ea.), Reddish and Cattle Egret (1 ea.), Plegadis sp. (4), Gr. Wht-fr. Goose (15), Oldsquaw (1), Surf and Wht.-winged Scoters (1 ea.), Osprey (2--ha! didn't match Grenada!), Bald Eagle (1a,1i), Wht.-winged Dove (5), Com. Ground-Dove (4), Rufous Hummingbird (1 m), LeConte's Sp. (3), Seaside Sp. (1), Fox Sp. (4), House Finch (2). Not a record breaker, but a good, solid count matching last year's species total.

Sumner (compiler, Genevieve Tharp)---22 Dec.; cloudy, foggy, rainy, windy; 43-35°; 3 observers in 1-2 parties; 63 species; 5630 individuals.

D-cr. Cormorant (100), 41 Great Blue Herons; 6 species of ducks (1200+) and 1000 unid.; 222 Horned Larks, 28 Brewer's Blackbirds. "Conditions were optimal for only about 2 hours the entire day." [You had lots of good company there, Genevieve!] How 'bout them larks, you coasters!

Vicksburg (Hal Moore, compiler)---16 Dec.; weather--"cooperated"; 17 observers in ? parties, 74 party-hr; 96 species; 12,836 individuals.

One new species for the count was Fish Crow (2). Pied-billed Grebe at all-time low; ducks also low. Missed Cattle Egret after having for 6 of 10 years. Unusual species: Rough-legged Hawk (1), Red-breasted Nuthatch (1), Wht.-eyed Vireo (2), Extra high were: 664 White Pelicans, 225 Black Vultures, 3 Osprey, 11 Barred Owl (all new highs, besides same for several small land birds). Looks like increasingly good coverage of the area.

Washington County (South) (Ed Alexander, compiler)---30 Dec.; a.m., brisk S winds, noon cold front passage followed by 25-30 mph N wind; temp. dropping ca. 35 degrees from low 70s; intermittent heavy rain in p.m.; 13 observers, ? parties; 99 species; 31,737 individuals.

Species new to count: Am. Crow (1) and House Finch (1); other boldface species, Oldsquaw (1) and Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk (1). Notable nos.: 1738 D-c. Cormorant, 97 Great Egret, 1 only Savannah Sp. Congratulations for a lot of wrens--5 species!

CBC SUMMARY: Although lacking the extreme cold of the previous winter, this one was quite a poor count period for the high amount of rainy days encountered. However, the results were remarkably good in spite of this when there were a sufficient number of counters capitalizing on the limited minutes of tolerable weather to get their quota of species. Let's hope for a better year in '91-'92! (Period will be Dec. 14 thru Jan. 2)

BIRDING BY THE CALENDAR:

MOSers Pursuing the 3rd-Century Year-List

A recent issue of Winging It, monthly newsletter of the Am. Birding Assoc., provided the compilation of 1990 list reporting. Of interest was the array of MOSers reporting their success in striving toward a possible 300 species year in Mississippi. Our new President, Terry Schiefer, led the pack for 1990 with 297 species--99% of the 300 goal! Oh, for that last 1%, Terry! Close on his heels was our ex-prexy Judy Toups at 296. Also listed were our MOS Sec'y. Chita Cassibry, plus members Gene and Shannon Knight, Jo Ree Pennell, Marvin Davis and Charles Delmas. Tennessee-resident member **Jeff R. Wilson** reset the **TN year-list record to 290**, bettering his own 1989 record, which had been a considerable feat at 286.

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BY INVITATION OF THE EDITOR:

BACHMAN'S WARBLER?? -- ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

by
William H. Turcotte

In about 60 years of studying birds, I have been on numerous "grail-bird" hunts and wild goose chases. Some I have found: Swainson's Warbler nests, Worm-eating Warbler nests, an Am. Redstart nest, Bachman's Sparrow nests, and numerous other first encounters that were new to me. Some of my finds were made while in pursuit of other "grails." For instance, it took a whole summer and part of another to find my first Swainson's nest, and several hundred miles of walking stream courses looking for beaver colonies. Then, in Holmes County, east of Goodman in Big Black Swamp, I happened upon a nest with the bird sitting on it on 3 June 1940. I found seven more active nests in 1940 and 1941.

Upon the editor's request, I am recounting an experience with a possible Bachman's Warbler nesting in Bolivar County. I was in woods of the Catfish Point Hunting Club properties around the middle of May in the early 1960's. Earlier in the morning I had driven along the woods roads watching for broods of Wild Turkey. At one stop I heard a Turkey gobble nearby. I decided to take a look at a fenced deer enclosure on a slightly higher elevation several hundred yards from the Mississippi River. I approached, stopped at the fence and then walked along it. There were some oak trees and many sycamores, gums and other species forming a nearly closed canopy having only small openings and a weedy understory.

I began to follow a dim path toward the lower elevation, and soon heard a bird song about 40 yards distant that I did not recognize. Walking toward it, I saw a singing warbler with yellow underparts, a black bib and some black on the crown. It was on a singing perch at about mid-story. Neither in appearance nor in song was it a Hooded or Kentucky Warbler.

The bird flew to a more distant perch and continued singing. I followed, and before reaching it, the bird flew again as I was at the edge of a dense cane thicket, which was higher than my head. I heard a bird chipping in the cane brake and tried to see it, but it would not come out into view. The "chip" callnotes were similar to those of Swainson's and Kentucky Warblers. While standing there, I chanced to see a nest in a broken-off cane to my right at just below my eye level. It held four white eggs. The nest was not one of a Swainson's Warbler. It resembled the

nest of a Painted Bunting, being made of small weed stems and finer material bound by cobwebs and containing some dried cane leaves. I heard an Indigo Bunting singing while at the nest. I have seen a dozen or more Indigo Bunting nests, only one on top of a broken cane, and all had pale blue eggs (or young).

REGISTRATION FORM
1991 SPRING MOS MEETING

Name:

Address:

Phone no.:

of Dinner reservations at \$12.00 x ___ = \$_____ (check enclosed)

Atlasing Information:

Names of people coming in your car (or party):

This party (or parties): (check 1 blank of each 2 below)

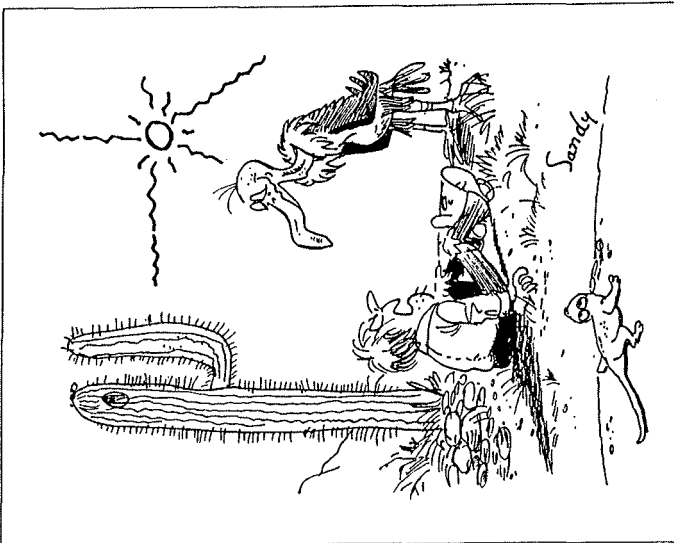
- ___ (1) will bird together as a group
___ (2) is willing to split into 2 groups

___ (1) needs a local guide
___ (2) can find their way with aid of maps

___ (1) wants to mostly walk
___ (2) wants to mostly ride

PLEASE SEND REGISTRATION FORM AND CHECK PAYABLE TO MOS
BY MAY 10TH TO:

Terence Schiefer
203 E. Gillespie St.
Starkville, MS 39759



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MISSISSIPPI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Organized 30 April 1955

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All persons interested in Mississippi bird life are invited to join the MOS. Annual dues: Life, \$100; Sustaining, \$20; *Individual, \$10; *Family, \$15; (Junior/Golden Age: Individual, \$4, Family, \$8); Subscribing (Institutional) \$10. Send dues now payable for 1991 to the Treasurer. * Please note correction of error in the last Newsletter for these membership categories!

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