

MISSISSIPPI  
ORNITHOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY  
NEWSLETTER  
Vol. 41, No. 2  
SUMMER (JUNE) 1996



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NATURAL SCIENCE  
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JACKSON, MISS. 39202

RUFF #1

LOOKING AHEAD:

More Pelagic Opportunities

The Louisiana Ornithological Society is having a pelagic trip out of Venice on September 14 similar to the MOS trip announced in the last Newsletter. Contact Bill Hemeter at home (504/861-3117) to see whether room is still available at \$60 for the 12-hr trip in LA waters. Bill says, "if enough people are interested, we could have a trip on July 13." Check with Don McKee (474-2521, h; 762-4822, w) for possible cancellations if you don't have a reservation for the June 8th MOS trip.

Fall Meeting Preview--OCTOBER 10-12, 1996

MOS' Fall '96 meeting will be held jointly with the Tennessee Ornithological Society on the weekend of October 10-12 at Crow's Neck Environmental Education Center of the Corps of Engineers' Tombigbee Waterway on Bay Springs Lake southwest of Tishomingo. There will be a Saturday afternoon indoors session of bird papers (15 or 20 min each); consider whether you have a topic to contribute to that part of the weekend's programs. Main housing arrangements will be in dormitory-style facilities of the Center; details will appear in the next Newsletter. Reserve those dates!

MOS FIELD DAY:

Shorebird Field Trip, August 17--Mark Woodrey

On Saturday, August 17th a field trip to look for southbound shorebirds is planned. We will search for migrant shorebirds at St. Catherine's Creek National Wildlife Refuge south of Natchez, and will have several shorebird "experts" on hand to help with our learning to identify this challenging group. This will be a great opportunity to gain experience with shorebird identification in a situation where the birds can be studied for extended periods in good light, and direct comparisons can be made between species. This day will also contribute toward development of the refuge's bird checklist. Last year in August Mark Woodrey and Mary Stevens observed over 10,000 shorebirds in the area, which is managed for them. **Highlights were 14 Buff-breasted Sandpipers and a single Willet** [although Mark is not actually positive about the bird's marital status]. Other shorebirds to be expected are Black-necked Stilts, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs plus Western, Least and Pectoral Sandpipers. Waders to be expected are Great Egrets, Cattle Egrets and White Ibis.

We will rendezvous at the Natchez Days Inn on US 61 (see below) at

8 a.m. and car pool to the refuge. The field trip will last until Noon, although some may opt to stay later. Be sure to bring along spotting scopes, if available, as well as binoculars, field guides, shorebird guides, SUNSCREEN, A HAT, and A COOLER FOR WATER, as the habitat will be open fields with no shade or access to cold drinks other than what we bring. Mark will supply some ice chests for storing cold drink cans.

Mark and other co-leaders of the trip will stay at Days Inn (601-445-8291) on Friday night. A block of 5 rooms, non-smoking, with 2 double beds, has been reserved at the Days Inn for Friday night (16 August) for MOSers at \$37.00 per night. When making reservations, be sure to mention you are with Mark Woodrey's group and use confirmation #84894. If you have any questions and/or plan to attend, please notify Mark Woodrey: 601/354-7303 (days) or 601/9224895 (evenings). He would like to know how many are attending so he can arrange for transportation in as few vehicles as possible. *Note: Mark will be out of town from July 25th to August 14th, so try to call before the 25th, or leave a message on his answering machine at home.*

### Spring Meeting, 1997--April 25-27th

Past-President JoRee Pennell sent an invitation for MOS to meet on the Gulf Coast for the weekend of 25-27 April 1997; the idea was gladly accepted by the MOS Board of Directors. We'll be looking forward to it!

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## LOOKING BACK:

From the MOS President--

### "How to Increase Your Life List While Sitting on Your Couch"

Allan J Mueller

Hello there, listers! Good news from the land of taxonomy (I think it's just south of Bovina). The American Ornithologists' Union's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature has issued the 40th supplement to the Check-list of North American Birds, and this time there are no lumpings, only splits. You can pick up life birds just sitting in your living room! Many of the changes are about birds that occur in Mexico or only on Attu in North America, but the following may be of interest to MOSers.

1) Change Great Egret *Casmerodius alba* to Great Egret *Ardea alba*. I'll bet when you saw "Great Egret" you thought that the Great/American/Common Egret was going to change its name again. This time it is only a change of the Latin name.

2) Change American Swallow-tailed Kite to Swallow-tailed Kite. It seems that they just have to fiddle.

3) Change American Golden-Plover *Pluvialis dominica* to American Golden-Plover *P. dominicus*. More fiddling.

4) Split Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* into Northern Flicker *C. a.* and Gilded Flicker *C. chrysoides*. In the U.S. the Gilded Flicker occurs in southeastern California and central Arizona, which means an add for many of us.

5) Change Eurasian Skylark to Sky Lark. Fiddle, fiddle, fiddle.

6) Split Scrub Jay *Aphelocoma coerulescens* into Florida Scrub-Jay *A. c.*, Island Scrub-Jay *A. insularis*, and Western Scrub-Jay *A.*

*californica*. The Florida Scrub-Jay occurs only in Florida, and the Island Scrub-Jay occurs only on Santa Cruz Island off the coast of California. All other Scrub-Jays are Western Scrub-Jays. Did you add one or two on this one?

7) Change Gray-breasted Jay to Mexican Jay. This is a change back to what it was before they changed it last time.

8) Split Gray-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* into Gray-cheeked Thrush *C. a.* and Bicknell's Thrush *C. bicknelli*. Bicknell's Thrush breeds in New England. I lived in Massachusetts for two years, but never bothered to look for this bird because it was only a subspecies at the time. Live and learn.

9) Add Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* to the North American list. This is added because of the bird that Terry Schiefer found in Starkville in 1992 [31 Jan.-1 Feb. only]. It's not often that Mississippi adds a species to the North American list.

10) Split Rufous-sided Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* into Eastern Towhee *P. e.* and Spotted Towhee *P. maculatus*. The Spotted Towhee is the western version of our local towhee. Another good split.

11) Split Sharp-tailed Sparrow *Ammodramus caudacutus* into Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow *A. c.* and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow *A. nelsoni*. The Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow breeds on the Atlantic coast from North Carolina to Maine and winters along the coast from New York to (rarely) the Gulf states. Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow breeds over a wide area of interior North America and on the Atlantic coast north of Maine and winters on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. The Nelson's is the most common bird in our area. This should cause you to look more closely at Sharp-tailed Sparrows from now on.

12) Split Northern Oriole *Icterus galbula* into Baltimore Oriole *I. g.*, Bullock's Oriole *I. bullockii*, and Black-backed Oriole *I. abeillei*. This brings back the very popular name "Baltimore Oriole", which is great for public relations. Bullock's Oriole is a western bird and the Black-backed Oriole only occurs in Mexico.

These are good changes. Right now the science of ornithology seems to be moving toward a new definition of a species (the phylogenetic species concept) which looks at many factors in deciding which groups of birds are distinct species. Previously, if birds could interbreed they were considered the same species. The newer concept considers that as only one factor in splitting and lumping species.

Bird taxonomy will never be final. As more is learned, more changes will be coming. These changes increase life lists, but the next set might go the other direction, so enjoy it while you can.

ED'S COMMENTS: These items may be found in the 40th Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union *Check-List of North American Birds*, published in *Auk* 112(3): 819-830, 1995. The actions on Citrine Wagtail, Rufous-sided Towhee and N. Oriole will add three species to the State List, when acted upon along with other pending additions by the Bird Records Committee, as the western forms of the latter two have occurred in Mississippi. The changes will have also added species to the personal USA and State Lists of a number of Mississippi bird-listers. For the Editor, these changes restored 3 Life List entries--Gilded Flicker, Spotted Towhee and Bullock's Oriole--while also adding one never expected to be a lifer, the Florida Scrub-Jay. This gain of 4 thanks to the AOU's "splitters" is nice, but there are still lots of former species lost to depredations by earlier-years' "lumpers"!

## **"THE RED-COCKADED WEEKEND"**

### Report on the Spring MOS Meeting--Carolyn Jarnagin

The meeting began Friday evening with refreshments at the Best Western Hotel in Forest, MS as attenders arrived and "signed in." Jerry Jackson showed a slide presentation on his work with woodpeckers, especially the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. After his talk, Margaret Copeland made assignments for Saturday a.m. visits to various colonies, with recording forms being given to group leaders.

After a buffet breakfast on Saturday morning, everyone met at assigned locations in the parking lot to gather and proceed to their designated colonies. At noon folks reported back to the Best Western for a lunch buffet and afternoon of presentations by guest speakers on the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers.

Bob Glasgow of the U.S. Forest Service in Jackson talked on the woodpecker habitat management of National Forest lands in Mississippi, and the need to increase active nesting sites. He also stressed the need to develop an aggressive program of nest-hole insert placement, predator control and summer burns to control understory vegetation in order to succeed in expanding the woodpecker numbers. From 1993 through 1995 the populations have shown improvement.

Stan Simpkins, also of the Forest Service, spoke on ecosystem management, sustaining the ecosystem and habitat management areas.

David Richardson, wildlife biologist at the Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, gave a slide presentation on his work at Noxubee with conservation of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

Finally, Bob McFarlane, author of "Stillness in the Pines," concluded the afternoon with a talk on his experiences with the Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

Those groups who needed to do so returned to their clusters for the evening check of the nest sites.

### **Minutes of the MOS Business Meeting, May 5, 1996**

At 9:00 p.m. a brief business meeting was called to order by president Allan Mueller. A tally of the day's bird list showed a total of 91 species. It was announced that the Fall Meeting will be held jointly with the Tennessee Ornithological Society (TOS) at Crow's Neck Nature Education Center on the Tombigbee Waterway in northeastern MS. Allan is working with the TOS officers on the arrangements; as TOS has a Saturday afternoon papers session, that format will be followed. Persons wishing to schedule a paper presentation should notify Marvin Davis who was elected to be program chairman for the papers session.

Mark Woodrey was appointed as chair of the Tucker Award selection committee.

Terry reminded members of the need to provide written documentation of interesting sightings for the use of the MOS Records Committee. Printed forms for reporting rare species are available, as well as cards for seasonal reporting of less exceptional sightings.

It was announced that the statewide Spring Migratory Bird Count would be on May 11th, and the Fall Count on the third Saturday in September. Marion Schiefer is the state coordinator.

International Migratory Bird Day activities were announced for May 19 at Pearl River Wildlife Management Area on Ross Barnett Reservoir.

Pres. Mueller discussed a wildlife diversity funding program, the name of which has been changed to "Teaming with Wildlife." It is a proposed legislative program to put an excise tax on recreational and

outdoors equipment to gather funds to be returned to the states for funding wildlife conservation and education activities. The equipment companies are opposed to the tax. PRO BASS shops have endorsed the tax and others, such as Swift Instruments and Carl Zeiss area also endorsing it. It is to be hoped that other such optical companies will follow this lead.

The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by Carolyn Jarnagin, Secretary, MOS

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**Many Thanks To:**

Judy Burkepile of Oxford for continuing faithful assistance in preparation of the Newsletter for mailing.

**Apologies To:**

Margaret Copeland whose name came out "Margaret Coleman" in the last issue regarding her two western hummer visitors in early winter.....

Martha Sargent who was omitted as a partner in the Sargent bird-banding team, *extraordinaire* (check the May issue of *WildBird* for a story on their hummingbird banding exploits).....and,

Doris Hope of Diamondhead, whose name was omitted as having teamed with Bennett Carver in the capture and banding of the fabulous **White-eared Hummingbird** at Gulfport in December.

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**ECHOES OF THE FEB. '96 IVORY GULL AT PICKWICK DAM, TENNESSEE**

Omitted from the Ivory Gull story in the last Newsletter was the tantalizing fact that when Jeff Wilson first saw the bird it was approaching from far up-lake in the direction of where the lake leaves Tennessee and enters Alabama and Mississippi!

An interesting speculation was encountered on the Internet from Ignaz Wanders (*yes, that is the real name of an Ohio State University astronomer/birder!*), who photographed a first winter Ivory Gull on Christmas Day 1995 at the St Clair River in Ontario. On his World Wide Web homepage ("Homepage of the Yeti!"), he raised the question whether the Ontario & Tennessee birds might have been the same individual. He added 2 TN photos by ED. to the ones already there: his 4 from ONT, and 1 from TN, in comparison. Unfortunately, we'll never know for sure.

From the "Monday Morning" column of the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal* came this comment:

"Rhodes College professor Herbert Smith, who witnessed the arrival at Pickwick Lake last month of hundreds of bird watchers from all over the United States, all hoping to catch a glimpse of a rare ivory gull says: *"They were perfectly happy to come this far and spend all day standing, just trying to see this bird. Most people can't stand to wait a few minutes in line at McDonald's."* "

Ed's. Comment: Well Herb, most people aren't bird watchers or they might have learned more patience; but we shouldn't claim that birders don't get impatient at McDonald's too!

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**"QUOTES DU JOUR" OF INTEREST TO BIRDERS, FROM THE INTERNET**

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862): "Thank God men cannot as yet fly and lay waste the sky as well as the earth!" *[Little did he know!]*

David Letterman: "Fall is my favorite season in Los Angeles, watching the birds change color and fall from the trees." *[Echoes of Thoreau]*

## HOW IS THE US POSTAL SERVICE TREATING YOUR MOS NEWSLETTERS??

From the March Newsletter mailing, two quick notices that only a shredded cover, which had disgorged its contents, had arrived. I wondered if there were more that I didn't hear about--did your copy not arrive well, or at all? Please communicate--if you don't get this June issue, be sure to let Editor know by return mail!

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## FROM THE FIELD--SPRING SEASON HIGHLIGHTS AND/OR SIDELIGHTS

1 March began the spring season (as long defined and observed by *National Audubon Soc. Field Notes*, and its prior version, *American Birds*) with a bang. On the 2nd Jeff Wilson called to report a 2nd winter **California Gull** at Sardis Dam, e.g., Lower Lake. Gene Knight had it the next day; your Editor's efforts to get views and flying, identifiable photos, needed to confirm the species for the Mississippi List, proved more frustrating than productive.

Then, on 14 March a call came from Fred Broerman, new staffer of the USFWS office in Grenada, to the effect that he had spotted a **Ruff** that a.m. in Quitman County of the Delta! Fred showed Davis and Terence and Marion Schiefer a male bird late in the day at a low-water, inactive catfish pond soon to be incorporated into the north unit of the Tallahatchie NWR, 6 miles south of Crowder. Despite poor lighting, identifiable photos were obtained for first documentation of this quite rare Eurasian sandpiper in Mississippi (and all of the USA). This Ruff was last seen flying east into Tallahatchie County, and could not be relocated the next day. The remarkable "*Ruff Spring*" had a further chapter 9 days later when a 2nd male Ruff was found about 20 mi. S of the first at the inactive Tipppo catfish farm. The G. Knights, T. Schiefers and Margaret Copeland shared that sighting.

Also at the Quitman site were a good many ducks of 10 species, including several Blue-winged Teal that signaled spring migration, along with the several species of migrant sandpipers, including 60+ Long-billed Dowitchers, lots of Pectorals and one Solitary. On 19 March at similar ponds on the Yazoo NWR in S Washington Co., new MOS member John Maul had 94 snipe and several dowitchers, while at Bagley Bottoms ponds in Lafayette Co., he had 38 Blue-winged Teal.

John Maul is a master's student in the Biology Dept. at Ole Miss, who departed in late April for field work in North Dakota on breeding waterfowl and prairie grassland birds. He is sharing field projects with David Horn, recent MOS member who transferred to Iowa State U. after taking his M.S., Biology from the U. of Mississippi.

More Caspian Terns than usual--10 to 20--were spotted in late April and May in transit through N MS at Lower Lake, Sardis Dam. On 19 May two unusual Least Terns were resting on the mudflats there. This brought to mind the fact that once more May-June floodwaters on the Lower Mississippi are delaying the terns' nesting on sandbars until they are again exposed by receding water levels.

## Boirdz N the 'Hood [Oxford/University, that is]

By early April the John Matthews' flock of Evening Grosbeaks had departed, while many of us still had large contingents of goldfinches and House Finches.

The Davises' patio, like those of many others, was "jumping" in April with flocks of the brightly-plumaged male Indigo Buntings\* and White-throated Sparrows plus quiet, obsequious Mourning Doves eating

millet scattered for them. Meanwhile, flocks of House Finches and Am. Goldfinches were fighting over sunflower feeders. Resident Cardinals, White-breasted Nuthatches and chickadees and titmice had to "shoulder there way in" to reach the feeders.

However, by the 5th of May the scene was changed. The sparrows had migrated to the North Woods, all but one of the buntings to northern sites and/or local countrysides, and the finches had evaporated to points uncertain. The hope of an occasional migrant warbler and vireo soon faded. May brought an element of sadness to the patio-based watchers--they had much less bird traffic to enjoy--but not to the remaining avian residents, who had regained their "rightful" access to the sunflower seeds without any more jostling and quarreling!

The continued expansion of the Oxford area population of Fish Crows brought us a recent question about those new "duck crows"--so called because the questioner thought they sounded like a duck's voice in a crow's body!

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\*The largest such yard flock reported locally was "ca. 25♂ and 7♀."

#### Report From Bill T's 'Hood-- William H. (Bill) Turcotte

"On 13 Feb. I watched a Mourning Dove building a nest in a live oak tree across the street from our house in Richland. On March 7 the adults were seen visiting the nest and feeding young. On Feb. 27th I hand-caught an adult male House Finch sitting on a feeder. It seemed to be in a good condition although apparently blinded in both eyes. It died in my hand soon after I caught it. Both it and another female or immature on 4 March had swollen eyelids and a circle of wet feathers around the eyes. A man at the reservoir who calls me regularly told me he had found 70 to 80 dead House Finches around his yard and feeders. On a happier note, a flock of House Finches has been feeding on the plum tree buds along our garden fence." -- March 1996

#### Query for the Readers on Rose-breasted Grosbeaks

Last Spring we reported that many folks were experiencing for the first time numbers of RBGs coming to their sunflower seed feeders in late April-early May. So far, it seems that this was not repeated in North Mississippi. However, *it would be most helpful to hear from you if you have experienced RBGs at your feeders this year, and whether this is the first time or a repetition.* There was a report in May on the Tennessee Rare Bird Alert of such an event across TN. PLEASE send a card to Marvin Davis, 308 Lewis Ln., Oxford 38655 if you had RBGs last year but not this, this year but not last, or both years!

#### Call for Info on Bald Eagle Nests

If you have direct or indirect knowledge concerning eagle nest sites in Mississippi, Mary Steven need to hear about it! She can be reached at the Natural Sciences Museum in Jackson at 601/354-7303 (days) or Fax, 601/354-7227. Mary can arrange with local rangers for follow up on unconfirmed reports, or even for an aerial check sometimes. She currently has data on 14 active sites. This year's eaglets should be well along from hatching by now.

The Answer to the "Puzzler" on Pectoral Sandpiper -- "It is estimated that 90% of the population of the Pectoral Sandpiper exists only in the spring and summer seasons. Do you agree with this statement?" You

should say YES! Their breeding season is spent in the (spring and) summer of the Northern Hemisphere; non-breeding season is spent in the (spring and) summer of the Southern Hemisphere. In-between time is spent travelling through the subtropical and tropical regions where it is always "summer"! Very few members of the species occur anywhere when it is winter *there*, or even in truly fall season, at *that place*. Of course, this also holds true for other species that migrate between the temperate (or higher) zones of Northern and Southern Hemispheres.

**MISSISSIPPI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
FINANCIAL REPORT  
September 1995 - April 1996**

Income and Expense Statement

Income:

Dues	940.00
Interest	608.72
Sales:	
Kites	73.00
T-shirts	315.00

TOTAL

\$1,936.72

Expenses:

Newsletters	
Printing	132.90
Postage	283.56
	416.46
Kites	
Postage	280.96
Printing	1864.34
	2145.30
Miscellaneous postage	15.18
Meetings	104.71
Dues	1000.00
Bank charges	3.00
Supplies	1.44
T-shirts	513.48

TOTAL

\$3,299.57

(Net Loss)

(1,362.85)

Balance Sheet

Assets:

Checking account	3,224.45
Savings account	1,055.64
Certificate of deposit	<u>17,235.28</u>

\$21,515.37

Liabilities:

Pelagic trip deposits	2,200.00
Net Worth	

<2,200.00>

\$19,295.37

-- Janet Dubuisson, Treasurer; May 28, 1996



- RBA

\* Texas  
\* Statewide  
\* February 12, 1996  
\* TXST9602.12

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- Birds mentioned

Pacific Loon  
\*\*\* MASKED DUCK \*\*\*  
Eurasian Widgeon  
Common Black-headed Gull  
\*\*\* Kelp Gull \*\*\*  
Glaucous Gull  
Northern Shrike  
Varied Thrush  
Henslow's Sparrow  
\*\*\* Blue Bunting \*\*\*  
McCown's Longspur

## A SAMPLE FROM SURFING THE INTERNET FOR RBAS (RARE BIRD ALERT TRANSCRIPTS) ACROSS USA

- Transcript

Number: (713)992-2757  
Compiler: Peter Gottschling  
Coverage: Texas Statewide  
Transcriber: Steve Matherly - smatherl@ix.netcom.com

Howdy, this is the Monday February 12, 1996 11:30pm update of the Texas Rare Bird Alert sponsored by the Houston Audubon Society. Stay tuned for KELP GULL, BLUE BUNTING, VARIED THRUSH, COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL, EURASIAN WIDGEON, and NORTHERN SHRIKE.

On the Upper Texas Coast, the adult KELP GULL was found again on the 12th at East Beach in Galveston. It had been absent since Saturday morning the 10th. The KELP GULL is usually just inside the wooden posts separating Big Reef from Appfel Park, but it can be all along the beach to the jetty. On the 9th it was seen on Bolivar Flats. Please do not drive around the bollards on the beach side. Vehicles are not permitted beyond the posts even at low tide when a lot of open beach is exposed. Just a few words on this bird. It is a spring, late third year bird almost completely into adult plumage. KELP GULLS occur off Yucatan and several were reported during the past few years on the Chandeleur Islands off Louisiana clearly establishing a record of vagrancy. A first winter GLAUCOUS GULL was on East Beach the 9th.

A PACIFIC LOON was at Offat's Bayou in Galveston the 11th along the south access [I45 feeder] road between 61st Street and Harborside [Drive?]. Seven MASKED DUCKS were at Brazos Bend State Park on the 10th before, and also out from the observation tower.

Two HENSLOW'S SPARROWS were again reported at Jones State Forest on the 10th. Take FM1488 west from I45. Proceed past the [state forest] office and park on the left by the pond and closed dirt road. Walk in on the dirt road to the metal gate on the left with the petroleum project sign. Proceed down the path past the tanks to an open field where the sparrows were located.

And now for something really different. A male VARIED THRUSH appeared

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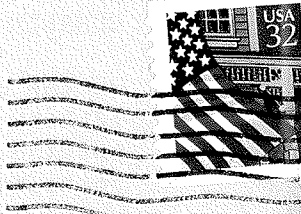
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All persons interested in Mississippi bird life are invited to join the MOS. **Annual dues:** Sustaining, \$20; Individual (regular), \$10; Family, \$15; Student, \$5; Senior, \$5; Subscribing, \$10; Life Membership, \$200. All classes of members receive the Mississippi Kite semi-annually, and the MOS Newsletter on a quarterly schedule each season. **Please send 1996 dues or new address, to: Janet Dubuisson, 22410 Glad Acres, Pass Christian, MS 39571.**  
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**FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:**

Plans for Fall & Spring Meetings;  
Plans for August Shorebird Chase;  
Expanding your Life List from your Easy Chair;  
News of Spring Birds **At Least 2 Spectaculars;**  
(Check Label for **RED** if you've forgotten '96 Dues)