
Mississippi
Ornithological
Society

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 43, No. 1

Spring (1 March) 1998



Northern Hawk Owl--See page 12

LOOKING AHEAD:

Spring MOS Meeting, April 3-5, 1998

MEETING PLACE: Tara Wildlife Management, located 35 minutes northwest of Vicksburg in the Eagle Lake Community, will be the site of the 1998 Spring meeting hosted by the Jackson Audubon Society. Tara is a 20,000-acre wildlife management area specializing in trophy whitetails and various other wildlife related activities including birding. There will **not** be a Turkey season at Tara this year, so we will not be restricted from birding in prime Wild Turkey hunting habitat.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Tara Lodge will be the center of activities including lodging, meals and programs. Large groups can be assured comfort at Tara Lodge. They serve three daily meals and are priced at \$25/day. Rooms are \$55/day double occupancy; \$50/day single occupancy. Motels are also available in Vicksburg.

FRIDAY EVENING, APRIL 3:

6:00 pm Informal social gathering, registration and supper will be held at the TARA LODGE. Field trip sign-up, meeting schedules and bird conservation issues will be discussed. Allan Mueller has agreed to lead an informal discussion on the Cormorant Issue in the Delta.

SATURDAY, APRIL 4:

6:30 am Breakfast at Tara Lodge

7:30 pm Field Trips start at parking lot of Tara Lodge

1:00 pm Lunch at Tara Lodge: A short meeting during lunch led by Chris Reynolds, Atlas Coordinator, to talk about regional coordinators for the Mississippi Atlas Program.

6:30 pm Banquet at Tara Lodge

SUNDAY, APRIL 5:

6:30 am Breakfast at Tara Lodge

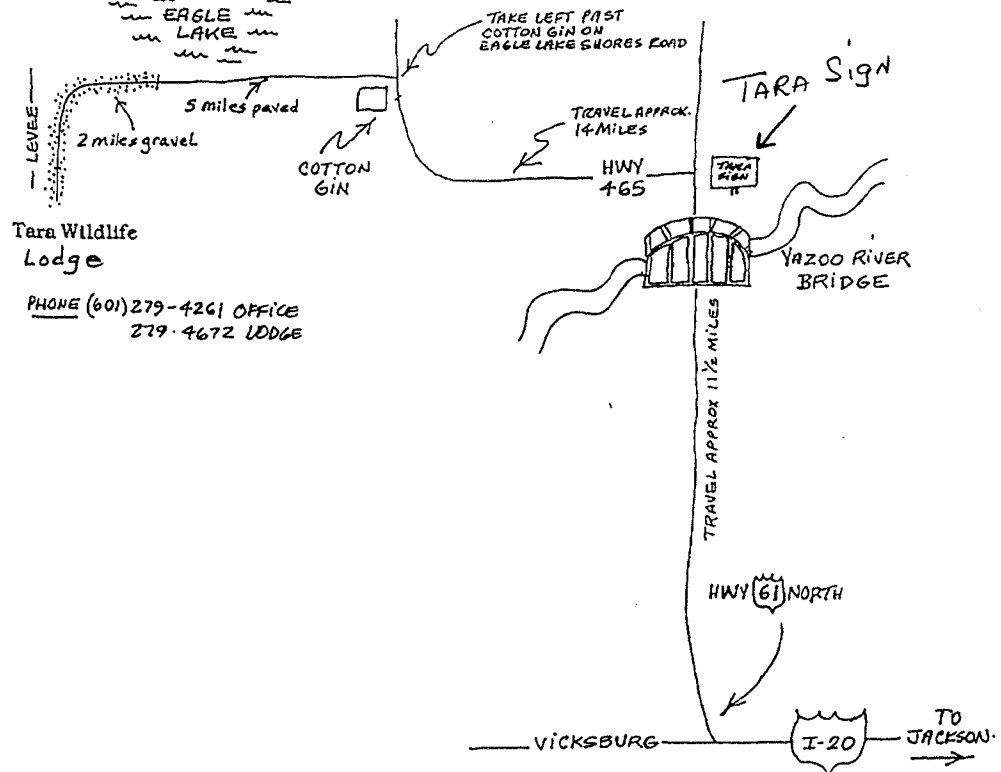
BANQUET SPEAKER: DR. FRANCISCO VILELLA, Biologist, Mississippi State University, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, will speak on "Conservation in the Tropics." He has worked extensively in the Caribbean on conservation issues and specifically on the recovery of the Puerto Rican Parrot.

FIELD TRIPS: Several different trips are being planned for Saturday around Eagle Lake, Mahannah Wildlife Management Area, Halpino Lake, the levees and batture lands, and the clay shooting course. All trips will depart from Tara Lodge parking lot at 7:30 am. Sunday morning

field trips will be arranged on Saturday evening according to interest.

RESERVATIONS AND REGISTRATION: Send your RESERVATION/REGISTRATION FORM from page 13. NOW, to Terry Jacobson, while it is on your mind, but **NO LATER than March 15th**. If you have any questions, call Mary Stevens at 956-7444(H) or 354-7303(W).

MAP TO TARA:



NEWS ON A MAJOR DEVELOPMENT:

THE AUDUBON ARK: MISSISSIPPI--Natl. Audubon Soc., Mississippi Office, Holly Springs, MS

A unique opportunity to launch a Mississippi state program as Audubon's 15th state office has come as a result of the extraordinary generosity of a Mississippi donor who contributed the funds necessary to launch the office. In addition, the donor's family contributed a 2,000 acre plantation near Holly Springs, Mississippi, which will become an Audubon Sanctuary and Bird Conservation/Education Center.

NAS has chosen a distinguished Audubon veteran to lead our new Mississippi program. Jesse Grantham, a seasoned 18-year veteran of the Audubon staff, has been named Director of the Mississippi State Office of the National Audubon Society at Holly Springs.

On the evening of Jan. 29, eleven Jackson Audubon members were treated to a visit from Steve Sadam of the NAS District Office in Ohio and he in turn surprised us by introducing us to Jesse and announcing this new windfall for Mississippi.

Jesse's responsibilities will include: developing and implementing management strategies for the new Strawberry Plains Sanctuary and creating a Bird Conservation Center which will focus on education, activism and outreach within our area. He will also be initiating a strategic planning process in partnership with Audubon's six Mississippi chapters that can provide a road map of conservation and education priorities for the new state office. These programs also represent

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specific interests of the donor.

Jesse comes to the assignment having served as the Assistant Director, and more recently the Director of Western Sanctuaries for the NAS, while also having day-to-day responsibility for management of Audubon's sanctuaries in northern California. Prior to his time in California, he headed Audubon's 13,000 acre Texas Coastal Sanctuaries Program which provided management for some of the nations most important colonial waterbird colonies. He was responsible for significantly raising Audubon's presence in Texas and creating a funding base that still provides significant support for the state office. Jesse started with Audubon in 1980 as a field biologist on the California Condor Recovery effort and became the Society's lead biologist on that program.

Jesse has extensive experience as a chapter leader, having served as Board member and Science chair for Valley Forge Audubon Society (PA), Board member and Conservation chair for Ventura Audubon Society (CA), and Field Trip and Program Chair, and President of Coastal Bend Audubon Society (TX).

While working on the condor program, he initiated the process for the acquisition of the 15,000 acre Bittercreek Natl. Wildlife Refuge, an important condor feeding area, and more recently put together the concept for the Desert to the Sea Wildlife Corridor across Central California. Within the last several months, he secured a \$100,000 gift to enable Audubon to be a major player in the design of the Kern County Valley Floor Habitat Conservation Plan.

Ten years ago in Texas he started the Rockport Hummer/Bird Celebration which attracted an estimated 5,000 people in 1996, and initially set the standard for new wildlife festivals across the U.S. With another Rockport resident, he started the Friends of Connie Hager and they raised \$125,000 to acquire the Connie Hager Sanctuary in Rockport.

Jesse's latest project is spearheading a Backyard Bird Habitat Program which introduces both small and large landowners to the importance of creating, restoring and enhancing habitats. Jesse sees this as an important next step in Audubon's "Important Bird Areas Program." He was responsible for the "Backyard Habitat Garden" at Disney World's Epcot Center.

Over the last ten years, Jesse has organized dozens of Birdathons in Texas and California that cumulatively have raised over a million dollars for Audubon. He has led an annual Birdathon in south Texas, which now raises over \$100,000 a year, for the last ten years, and has set the record for the most species seen (212) in Texas in a single day. -- MARY STEVENS

LOOKING AHEAD TO:

“SPRING FEVER “

by Jeff Bouton, Fairbanks, Alaska--Sunday 8 Feb 1998 [jbouton@mosquitonet.com]
(from BirdChat on the Internet, by permission of the author)

Here in interior Alaska, the local birds are beginning to get anxious. Great Horned and Boreal Owls are singing away, and the Redpolls are squabbling amongst themselves and singing their long trilled songs. Chickadees are singing their amorous love songs as well. The sun is now getting fairly high above the horizon and actually generates heat that you can feel! Temperature at mid day can often be 20-30° higher than the lows, and the days are now lengthening by 7 min/day.

All of this sets a birder's heart to stir. It feels as though spring is here. So much so that I went on an extended drive to look for some new birds: with all of this activity, surely there could be a migrant around. I drove 250 miles in all looking for anything different. Unfortunately, I saw only

seven species (eight if you include a road-killed Willow Ptarmigan), and none were migrants. The Northern Hawk Owl and Black-billed Magpie were new for the year, but everything else was commonplace--the ubiquitous Rock Dove, hundreds of Ravens, a few Common Redpolls, a Black-capped Chickadee, and a Gray Jay. Since I'd gone so far and evening was approaching, I decided I'd go to a spot where Great Gray Owls had nested last year. I got there only to find the road hopelessly drifted in 5 miles out! So I turned away dejected and made the long trek home.

Despite my hopes, I know full well that the first migrants won't be seen for another month or more. Snow Buntings will begin to trickle through in mid-to-late March, and the first Canada Goose will arrive in early April, with a Mallard or two. The first two weeks in April will bring the first Green-winged Teal, Pintails, N. Shovelers, Am. Wigeon, White-fronted Geese, the first gulls (alternate-plumaged Herring Gulls), and the first raptors. Golden and Bald Eagles will be the first I usually see, with Rough-legged and Harlan's Red-tailed Hawks following close behind. The first songbirds to make their way back are generally Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers, in the last few days of April or very early May. By mid-May there will be Lapland Longspurs, thrushes, and sparrows. The last to arrive will be Arctic Warblers and Alder Flycatchers, which won't make their presence known in the interior until nearly 10 June--nearly two weeks after the owls and chickadees have fledged!

We have now endured nearly four months with only a handful of hearty bird species. My year-list sits steadfast at 15 species, and while pleasant, the next two months can be torturous to a birder. It is the worst spring fever you can ever imagine, and one of nature's cruelest tricks. Until it passes, I will be biting my lip anxiously awaiting the arrival of that first migrant, tracking them from my computer monitor as they make their way across the country south of here, getting ever closer to their summer home! Good birding.

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE PROJECT

Beginning in the spring of 1998, the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks will gather data on the status and distribution of the Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) in Mississippi. As part of this pilot project, sponsored by the Southeast Working Group of Partners in Flight and the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, sightings from Mississippi will be plotted on maps of Mississippi. After being mapped, cooperators with the Museum of Natural Science will then target nest searching efforts in areas where sightings are concentrated to hopefully locate and map active nest sites. In addition, data from Mississippi will be combined with similar data from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas to determine the status and distribution of this species across the Southeastern United States. Partners in this endeavor include the state wildlife agencies mentioned above, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, the US Forest Service, the US Army Corps of Engineers, The Nature Conservancy, Timber Industry Companies, and other private conservation organizations.

Both the range and the numbers of Swallow-tailed Kites in the US have been greatly reduced. Swallow-tailed Kites have been identified by Partners in Flight and the American Bird Conservancy as a high priority species in need of conservation attention. You can help in determining the extent and concentrations of these birds in Mississippi by sending your observations to Mark Woodrey at the Museum of Natural Science in Jackson (address below). A

brief report summarizing the results of this survey will be provided to each participant in the fall.
REMEMBER, THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE DATA VALUABLE TO THE CONSERVATION OF THE SPECTACULAR BIRDLIFE OF MISSISSIPPI!

DATA NEEDED FOR EACH OBSERVATION*:

1. date sighted;
2. time of day;
3. number of kites seen;
4. location (as specific as possible; for example - ½ mile north of I-10 bridge over the west channel of the Pascagoula River);
5. bird seen soaring or perched;
6. bird seen carrying nesting material (stick, Spanish moss);
7. bird seen carrying food (large insects, snakes);
8. any relevant comments;
9. your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address (if you have e-mail).

*Note: Sighting data forms will be available for distribution at the Spring Meeting of MOS at Tara. If you cannot attend this meeting, but wish to participate in this important project, please contact Mark Woodrey at the Museum and he will gladly mail you copies of the data sheet.

SEND YOUR OBSERVATIONS TO:

Mark S. Woodrey, Avian Ecologist

Attention: Swallow-tailed Kite Survey

MS Museum of Natural Science; 111 North Jefferson Street; Jackson, MS 39202

ANOTHER APRIL NOTE: A combined North Am. Ornithological Congress will be in St. Louis, 6-12 April '98. (Wilson, Cooper, AOU, Field Ornith., Colonial Waterbird, Raptor socs.)

SCHEDULE OF 1998 PELAGIC BIRDING TRIPS FROM VENICE, LA.:

June 13, August 8, September 19, and December 12, 1998

If you wish to "shoot" for some Lifers that you'll likely never get any other way, please make reservations soon! The cost is \$65 per person (no refunds unless a replacement can be found for you); send check made out to L.O.S. to cruise director; Bill Hemeter, 1825 Audubon St., New Orleans, LA 70118; phone inquiries: home, 504-861-3117; work, 504-392-1618; fax 392-1813.

LOOKING BACK:

FROM THE FIELD--REPORTS ON THE WINTER SEASON

For excitement, the rallidae (rail family) top the list this season, with six species known present in the State. Just recently, on 19 February, a trio of Coasters were so LUCKY to see a **Black Rail** in broad daylight. It was on a weekly survey by official volunteer observers, Charlie Delmas, Don McKee and Janet Peterson, at the Sandhill Crane NWR ponds-marsh adjacent to the Seaman Road Wastewater Treatment Plant of Jackson County. It turns out that some visitors had seen the species at the same precise spot ca. 2.5 weeks before. However, 2 groups visiting (coincidentally) on 21 Feb. were not so blessed, failing even to locate some cranes, much less a Black Rail. The 2nd-rarest/hardest-to-spot US rail, the **Yellow Rail**, was found by Fred Broerman on NWR properties in the north Delta several times in late fall/early winter, including one on the

Sumner, MS Christmas Bird Count, 1st for the MS all-time CBC list! Details will be published later, but the sightings did NOT come easily.

Also from the Delta come reports of many **LeConte's Sparrows**, Marsh and Sedge Wrens and some **Am. Bitterns**, plus some unusual **Dickcissels**. Those sparrows were, however, unable to match the density of LeConte's found in a field on the Sardis Waterfowl Refuge, where 27(!) were found for the Sardis lake CBC by Gene Knight and Vic Theobald. Happily, the sparrows stayed put and were cooperative for the group seeking them on the January Sparrow Seminar. On 10 Feb. Fred Broerman visited two federal properties in Quitman Co. near Sledge. On a 750-acre property he flushed 12 **Short-eared Owls**, an American bittern, a **Virginia Rail**, and plenty of LeConte's sparrows, lesser numbers of sedge and marsh wrens. Another property north of Sledge yielded *another* 9 **Short-eared Owls**.

Exceptional away from the Gulf Coast in winter was a female/immature **Anhinga** found 21 December on the Noxubee CBC by Arlie and Ethel Wilson on the Brooksville Road east of the Noxubee River perched in trees behind a catfish pond. Anhingas are rare there at any season, and there are no reliable winter records for the area after the abandonment of the nesting colony at Bluff Lake in the late 1970s. Other outstanding species included **Am. Bittern** and **King Rails**. On 16 January, Terry saw an adult **Ross's Goose** at Noxubee NWR with a flock of Canadas.

Golden Eagle--there were known to be at least 4 Golden in N Miss in late January--a rare happening, as far as we know. One at the Crowder Ponds area, different from the one ca. 25 mi S of there, in NW Grenada Co. on White Lake Road (which heads north off of MS# 8 about 3 miles west of HWY 35) by Fred B; a third that Terry S reported from Noxubee NWR, and a 4th reported by Vic Theobald once on the Sardis Waterfowl Refuge. The CBC and Corps-sponsored January **Bald Eagle** counts on Sardis Lake both were all-time highs at 32 and 37, respectively. Available for viewing is a **Great Horned Owl nest** in the primitive campground below Sardis Dam, Shady Bend. Egg incubation began on 11 February and hatching is due four weeks from then. See Bob and Shirley Holtgren at the hosts' trailer for precise viewing instructions.

While considering raptors, it was gratifying to many when the group accompanying Judy Toups from the south to North Miss. found the perennial **Prairie Falcon** at Cossar State Park on Enid Lake on 23 January. For another viewing, read what Q.B. Gray reported to MISSBIRD:

"The **Prairie Falcon** at Enid Lake put on a great show for me this afternoon with some help from an unexpected source. I had driven to the end of the peninsula at Cossar St. Park when I spotted an immature Bald Eagle perched on a snag at the edge of the water. After about 10 minutes, the eagle had enough of my watching and flew west toward the dam. I was following him in my scope, and when he went into the trees on the next peninsular, here comes the falcon! The falcon made three dives; on each he started above the eagle, just missing him as he went by, making a big circle and repeating the dive. The eagle deciding I was the least of the evils, came back and landed one snag over from his original perch. The falcon got his tree line back, I was thrilled over the show, and the eagle with a few ruffled feathers was so much the wiser."

Several scattered reports of the migratory subspecies of **Sandhill Cranes** from north and central MS--e.g., Gene and Shannon Knight reported 45 flying over Noxubee NWR on 2 January. Robert Ballinger of Delta Wildlife Foundation saw 35 Sandhill Cranes near Leland in Washington

Co. on 30 January. Several NW Miss or Memphis area folks have seen a flock, ca. 20(?) in Tunica Co. again, as per '96. These reports were exciting and encouraging for that species firming-up a wintering presence in the state. Less surprising was the continuing trend for the winter inland occurrence of Am. White Pelicans in MS, mostly on the large reservoirs. Surprising for their lack was an absence of any unusual gulls species this winter. The one remarkable shorebird species was a lone, late **Pectoral Sandpiper** on the new CBC at Tupelo, and afterwards until 10 January.

On 15 January, Terence Schiefer saw 5 Eared Grebes at the Eupora, MS sewage lagoon. Also present were two Pied-billed Grebes and one Horned Grebe. Eared Grebes are always rare in this part of the state but this is the first true winter record for our area. He also found an unusual imm. male **Oldsquaw** at the Mississippi State University North Farm sewage lagoon on Friday 23 Jan.. An early Jan. afternoon drive from Nettleton to Fulton by Allen Jolley yielded a fine list of 64 species, which included Snow and Gr. White-fronted Geese. Ken Hackman of Madison was appropriately surprised and pleased to find a **Yellow-throated Warbler** along Pipeline Road at Barnett Reservoir on 7 February.

Two **White-winged Doves** and a **Com. Ground Dove** in far NW Miss.. were a 2nd-hand report from Jeff Wilson. More directly, the Knights and others on 1/24 saw a new high count, **32**, for the **Eurasian Collared-Dove** in N Miss. at Batesville, where last summer there were only 9.

The best report of a rare winter finch species was from K.C. Jensen, research ecologist with the US Army Corps of Engineers, Waterways Experiment Station, Vicksburg, who had 10-15 **Evening Grosbeaks** at his feeder in Vicksburg from mid-January, as of 2 February. Also present were large numbers of **Purple Finches**; however, he found Am. Goldfinch numbers to be reduced dramatically from the past 5-year average. A lone **Red Crossbill** was reported by Gene Knight on the Sardis Lake CBC.

[Remember, this is not an exhaustive season review--just "teasers"; the definitive report will appear later in the Mississippi Kite as "Birds Around the State"]

REPORT ON THE WINTER SPARROW WORKSHOP: JAN. 16-17, 1998:

"NORTH-COUNTRY ADVENTURE"

by Matthew Smith, Jackson, MS

Everything is relative, and for a cramped Jackson schoolboy possessed by the elan of birding, yet repressed by carelessness and mandatory education, Oxford might as well be Nome, Alaska. And for one snowy January weekend the frigid North turned out to be a mere two-and-a-half hours away. This is a paean to Gene & Shannon Knight, and their Sparrow Workshop nonpareil.

It was in a deliciously clandestine state of mind that (after having assured my skeptical teachers that birds are in fact educational) I left school three hours early to join my irrepressible birding cronies, Mary Stevens and Wilma Pickett. Sparrows! The word will not send shivers down the spine of your average Joe; but your average Joe has probably never heard the tintinnabulous chatter of a junco flock, or ingested the subtle resplendence of a white-throat at 8x. This may seem to be an unabashed romanticization of what was in essence a celebration of little brown birds; yet the challenge, the intricacy, and the muted loveliness of sparrows is enough to set the properly calibrated heart to pumping. Once in Oxford (and in the capable hands of Gene Knight), we coached ourselves into the wee hours of the night on the finer points of sparrow ID.

Given a good look (or, in some cases, even a not-so-good look), sparrows are not hard--simply a bit scary at first. Gene took care to hammer this vital point into each of our heads; and by the next morning, when umpteen warm noses poked out of warm hotel rooms into a winter wonderland, we were ready to take on the monster.

The day started with a bang and unrolled before us like a smorgasbord of avian delicacy. No sooner had we set expectant foot inside the Sardis Waterfowl Refuge than a Merlin careened across the ponds at eye level; an array of geese, Mallards, and exotically northern Black Ducks assembled in the skies; and a host of cheerfully chirping Song, Savannah, and Field Sparrows accompanied us at every turn, demanding to be differentiated. But like any birders worth their sunflower seeds, our eyes were on the prize: the stealth bomber of songbirds, the sparrow with such conniving reluctance to be spotted that it will RUN before it flies, the notorious and enigmatic LeConte's Sparrow. Fortunately, Gene and his crack crew of birding accomplices had recently staked out a veritable throng of these devilish creatures--the LeConte's bonanza!

By the time we left our viewing of the waterfowl area to head afield, we were well-sated with eight species of sparrows, including a sneak preview of LeConte's himself. For seemingly hours we had conducted a standoff, binocs twitching at every hint of movement, while our quarry sat and ticked like a malicious little time bomb, plotting how to elude these great stomping nuisances. Needless to say, by the time most of us got our fleeting view, our built-up resentment of the enemy melted into fawning "oohs" and "aahs" of appreciation. For LeConte's Sparrow is truly a wondrous bird, emblazoned with rich golden-browns and soft grays. As our mental pictures were translated from lifeless paintings to vivid reality, we fell head-over-heels in love with the diabolical little rascal--as was, I suppose, inevitable.

Just as the Knights had promised, our next field was chock full of LeConte's Sparrows, which catapulted flimsily from tussock to tussock with every step we took. Any passers-by would have been duly perplexed to witness a motley band of people frolicking through a damp field, madly changing direction in pursuit of tiny whizzing blurs. Birders are bizarre and proud of it.

After a hearty lunch in town, we were again off to tackle the Crowder ponds. In such a lap of birding luxury, it is difficult to concentrate on sparrows, although we added White-crowned to our list; we had wild delusions of grandeur upon spotting any far-off speck that appeared even remotely eagle-ish, and our attention was temporarily distracted by the stirring spectacle of hundreds of geese and pelicans rising into the sky. But the whole time we were under the watchful eyes and careful tutelage of Gene and Shannon, who made quite sure that not a soul went home without learning SOMETHING.

We may not have uncovered any heart-stopping rarities; we may not have made any headline news; but the simple camaraderie of those united by a common thread is far more valuable. Who could pass up the opportunity to gather fifteen people who share a purpose and an amorous passion--and set them loose doing what they love to do? Birding is certainly of inestimable ecological value, but it is also a tool for building friendships, for getting people together. Heaven help the unenlightened!

[Ed.: *Hey--shouldn't those 10th grade teachers let Matthew (15 years) out of school early more often? My expectations, when soliciting this report, were over-filled. We should all hope for more 10th-graders to emulate his vocabulary building exercises.*]

[NEXT, the REALLY-NORTH-Country Adventure!]

EXPEDITION REPORT: "MINNESOTA BIRDING--IN JUNE??!"

by Shannon Knight, Oxford

Some of our birder friends thought that we were crazy to head to Minnesota in search of the Great Gray Owl in June, but that's when we had the time to do it, so we were going to go for it. If nothing else, it was going to be a challenge and another adventure!

Leaving the house on the morning of May 31, 1997, the weather was rainy, cool, and very windy. We made a quick check of all our supplies, especially bug spray. We had been warned about the black flies. We dropped the cat at the vet at about 8:00 a.m., then headed out for Grayling, MI--our first night's destination. Gene and I like to make the most of every trip, taking a checklist, atlas/gazetteer, and birder's guide for each state that we travel through, plus plenty of our own food and spring water, and keeping a daily journal of our trip. We break frequently and take advantage of the birding at each stop. It keeps us rejuvenated even on the longest treks. The rain followed us, but we did add to our TN, KY, and IN lists that day. We arrived at the Holiday Inn in Grayling, MI, at 1:00 a.m. (C.S.T.) on Sunday, June 1. We jumped into bed for a few Z-z-z's before meeting at 7.00 a.m. with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service tour of the Kirtland's Warbler jack pine habitat. We saw and heard 5 Kirtland's Warblers within forty-five minutes of leaving the motel! They were so easy to see, so vocal, and so beautiful. We couldn't believe it! Elated, we left for Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

We birded in Sault Ste. Marie for a while and then on to White Fish Point by late afternoon. meeting with other birders to watch for a jaeger spotted the day before. No luck.

Our focus there at Paradise, MI was to try for the Great Gray Owl and the Spruce Grouse. Our good birder friend, Tom Heatley, had told us where to go on Vermillion Road to see the Grouse, and that Great Gray Owls were being seen at Whitefish Point. Early Monday morning, June 2, we spent several hours looking for the Owls. We met several groups of birders who had "just seen them," but we had no luck. We did get two Lifers, the Black-backed Woodpecker and White-winged Crossbills, and had a life look at a Ruffed Grouse. We decided to move on to try for the Spruce Grouse. We knew that we were going to have to really work for this very secretive bird. It seemed as though we hiked those snowmobile trails for hours (actually, 4.5 hours)! Finally, Gene spotted a grouse about 100 feet to our right. We both focused on it, got the scope on it, made sure of the ID marks, and BINGO! Spruce Grouse--another lifer!

Exhausted but happy, we went back to "the Point", sat in the dilapidated chairs near the feeders for a bite of lunch and rest, enjoying the Rose-breasted and Evening Grosbeaks; Baltimore Orioles' problem-solving ways to drink from hummingbird feeders, Ruby-throated hummingbirds dive-bombing each other, and a Peregrine Falcon and a Cooper's Hawk bursting in on the tranquil scene to remind us not to get too comfortable. Late afternoon found us again working the perimeter and trails in search of Great Gray, but with no luck. We would try again in the morning.

As we left our motel at 5:00 a.m. on June 3, we were so hopeful of seeing the Owls. We had allotted ourselves so many days at each place, so we knew that we had to get the Owl here, or move on to MN and chance it there. We searched for several hours with no sighting. Even the excitement of getting two lifers was paled by an occurrence we had never experienced. Common Loons were so abundant in every nook and inlet around "the Point" that their haunting calls sounded stereophonic, emptying our minds of everything except the beauty of the moment. As we left Paradise at 10:30 a.m. heading west toward Wisconsin, we felt happy about what we had

seen and experienced, but we still had to meet the challenge of finding the Great Gray Owl!

While traveling across WI that day, we added to that state's checklist, but saw no lifers. We reached our next stop at Eveleth, MN in St. Louis Co., just north of Duluth, about 8:30 p.m., ordered room service, and "hit the sack." Our target birds in this area were the Great Gray, Yellow Rail and Boreal Chickadee.

Starting the day with a Veery "in hand" was a positive omen. Gene was outside putting ice in the cooler when he witnessed a Sharp-shinned Hawk attacking a Veery in a nearby bush. The frantic Veery flew into the wall and was stunned--therefore, "a bird in the hand." It was 47 degrees, cloudy, and damp as we left our room at 5:30 the morning of June 4. After talking to MN birder Ben Yokel, who had heard three Yellow Rails on Rd. 319, we were going to make an effort for this bird before daylight. As we reached the Yellow Rail area, it began to rain heavily. The unpaved dirt road was fast becoming a muddy quagmire. We made a quick escape back to the highway. At daybreak, we were amused as we drove along to see Snipe perched on telephone wires--not a common sight in MS! We tried again late in the day for the Rail without success.

Using Kim Eckert's "BIRDER'S GUIDE TO MINNESOTA," we headed for Sax-Zim Bog in search of the Great Gray. The lacy green tamaracks and northern white cedars were beautiful! We had traveled the suggested roads in the area for over an hour, almost getting a bit frustrated, knowing that the later it got, the less chance of seeing an Owl. We were driving along Rd. 213, busily eyeing every stump and fencepost in sight. We were both looking to the left, when I just happened to glance to my right and gasped so loudly that I almost choked! There it was! A Great Gray Owl! We had already passed it. Gene stopped gently, backed up slowly, and the Owl remained on the fencepost less than 50 feet from our van! We sat there for 15 minutes studying this magnificent Owl. We hardly breathed. The eyes and facial expression were so docile compared to the fierceness and intensity of other nocturnal raptors. It was so large, soft, and fluffy and seemingly tame that it actually looked huggable. Our "target bird" quietly flew into the tall tamaracks.

As we grinned at each other triumphantly and gave "high fives," Gene, with those all-hearing ears of his, said that he was hearing a Connecticut Warbler singing. Of course my heart skipped a beat. This would be a lifer for me, but not for Gene. We jumped out, quickly put on boots and PLENTY of bug spray (the black flies had already done a number on me!). Walking into the bog was a unique experience--the spongy moss offering a slight buoyancy to each step.

After going into the tamarack stand several hundred feet from the road, we could hear the CT Warbler singing so clearly. We also saw the Great Gray perched close by, watching. We were afraid to move or breathe--I wanted this bird so badly! Gene was eyeballing the undergrowth, being that the CT is a ground skulker. Its clear song drew my binoculars to the top of a nearby tamarack. Perfect! A full gray hood and white eye-ring, interestingly walking along the branches and singing its distinctive song. Another heart-stopper! We marveled on the way back to the van at the fact that it was only 7:20 a.m., and we had already seen these two fantastic birds! Could we stand any more? The Veery had indeed been a good omen.

We spent the remainder of the morning birding in the area and adding to our MN list. No Boreal Chickadee at Sax-Zim. We had heard about an Arctic Tern being reported in the bay area at Duluth, so we decided to make a run for that bird. We spent an hour at the impoundment with another birder looking for the tern. Thunder, lightning, and an extremely heavy rainstorm

prevented any further efforts that day. (We tried again the next day with no luck.) Returning to Sax-Zim on Hwy, 133, we were flabbergasted to see yet another Great Gray resting on a gnarly snag in a small open field. What a day! Thank you again Mother Nature. Darkness came early, with the wind, rain, and cold. As we pulled into our motel, drained by exhilaration and the elements, we eagerly anticipated a hot meal, a warm bed, and the usual retelling of events to savor the day.

We started out again before daybreak the next morning looking for the Yellow Rail. As we pulled out of the parking lot the rain began to pour--foiled again! Ben Yokel had told Gene about an area where Mourning Warblers nest. This would be another lifer for me! Gene has had them in MS. We turned off Hwy. 53 onto a dead-end road. The rain had changed to mist. We rolled down the windows and listened intently. Gene heard a Mourning Warbler singing on his side. We jumped out, listened, and both heard it singing clearly again. It was in a wet aspen stand just below the road. Boots on, adrenalin high, we quietly made our way through the muck and undergrowth. We stood frozen--listening and watching for any movement or sound that would give away its location. There it was again! We looked upward and spotted a gorgeous first spring male Mourning Warbler on a bare branch of an aspen tree, 15 feet above us! The gray hood, dotted black bib, and lack of eye-ring left no room for doubt; 7:40 a.m. and another lifer for me!

Leaving the area, we traveled west toward Aitkin Co. in search of the Boreal Chickadee and the Yellow Rail. We saw several female Ruffed Grouse with chicks (adorable!) that day and heard them booming at every wayside stop. Our last-ditch effort for the Chickadee was at Blandon Paper Co. Tree Farm on Hwy. 200 as suggested in the MN Guide. We stopped along the road at an aspen thicket between two stands of spruce. We birded up and down the road and into the thickets on both sides of the road. As we stopped for a water break, we heard a distant slow, very nasal Chickadee call coming from the aspen thicket. We crossed over and waited. Finally, a single bird came out of the thicket and landed in a tall spruce, about 50 feet from us. It called again--definitely a Boreal! We observed the brownish wash on its flanks, all gray wing coverts, brownish-gray on top, and black bib. What a chase for such a little lifer! With daylight lingering we decided to go back to McGregor Marsh to again try for a Yellow Rail. Striking stones, flashlight in hand, and walking for 2.5 hours did not turn up a single Rail. We were disappointed, but knew that we had made good efforts.

It was cool and cloudy as we pulled out of Eveleth on Friday morning. Traveling west on Hwy. 30 in Koochiching Co., we turned left on Thomey-William Rd. where we spied still another Great Gray sitting on a bare branch! Three Great Grays so far--we were ecstatic! We moved on to Roseau Co. on the Canadian border with an outside hope of spotting the Northern Hawk Owl (two were being seen in the area). Arriving in Roseau at 6:15 p.m. we ate a quick supper and headed out on Hwy. 310 N. After all, we still had 3.5 hours of daylight left! To our amazement, we saw our fourth Great Gray resting on a bare tamarack branch on the perimeter of the coniferous forest at 9:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 7. was clear and crisp as we traveled north again on Hwy. 310. The Northern Hawk Owl was uppermost in our minds. Again we spotted another Great Gray (perhaps the same one from the previous evening). Our fifth sighting of this wonderful Owl! We pulled over to the side of the road to study the ID marks of the Hawk Owl, making sure that they were imprinted on our minds.

Then, out of nowhere--we couldn't believe it! A Northern Hawk Owl darted across the road in front of us, into the trees, then out again--giving us only seconds to see the barred underparts, whitish face with dark outline, spotted wings and back, and long banded tail! It disappeared just as quickly as it had appeared. WOW! Another lifer for both of us! To add to the excitement, Black Bear and Timber Wolves were also seen along Hwy. 310. We never knew that these magnificent wolves were so large and swift.

We left Roseau around 11:00 a.m., satiated with the events of the morning. Referring to our MN Guide, we went to an area in Marshall Co. where Baird's Sparrows had been seen on rare occasions. Rd. 114 was very "birdy" and gave us hope of seeing our Bairds. We stopped along a shaded fence line where birds were popping up everywhere. A sparrow with a buffy central crown stripe got our attention as it sat atop a bush and began singing. We stepped back into the van--Gene putting in the tape to listen to the Baird's song and I looking in the field guide to match ID marks. Baird's Sparrow! Less spectacular, but nevertheless another lifer for us.

Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge was our next destination. The hotline was reporting a Black Rail being heard several days earlier. Agassiz was awesome beyond words. Its 61,500 acres of diverse habitats--wetland, shrubland, forestland, grassland, and cropland--offered a full menu of birds and wildlife for any hungry palate. No, we didn't get the Black Rail, but seeing the graceful Red-necked Grebes on their "floatilla" nests will always be a memorable sight. It was one of those days that we didn't want to end. We remained until the last trace of light disappeared and the ducks and herons had "put in" for the evening. A Great Horned Owl made an appearance and the Whip-poor-wills began to call. We called it a day at 11:00 p.m.

With only a few days left, we decided to chase the Three-toed Woodpecker and the Boreal Owl. We turned again to our faithful MN Guide and headed to Echo Trail, north of Ely, MN. What a beautiful, unique village Ely is! It was late afternoon when we headed up the Trail. We stopped in the burned, cut-over location suggested in the Guide. We had learned from our Peterson tapes that the Three-toed Woodpecker had a distinctive drumming pattern during the breeding season. We had been in the area for about 45 minutes when we heard the drumming several times, then a call note. The woodpecker flew past us, so that we could see the barred sides and paler blurry-banded back. It called again as it went by, 5:45 p.m. and another lifer! We continued along the Echo Trail. Moose tracks were everywhere, but we never saw one. Around 7:30 that evening we heard the winnowing sound of the Boreal Owl--another lifer under our belts!

We spent the next day birding around Ely, taking in the sights and wildlife, visiting the International Wolf Center, and getting a new tire. We headed south the following morning. Friday, June 13, we were in St. Louis, MO, to get the Eurasian Tree Sparrow. We followed directions in ABA's "Winging It" and found it without any problems--an easy lifer!

We pulled into our driveway at 9:30 p.m. that same evening. We were happily exhausted--with vivid memories of fantastic birds, beautiful landscapes, and wonderful wildlife! As our birder friends told us, it's crazy to go looking for Great Gray Owls in MN in June, but we've been told that we were crazy about a lot of other things too! Just do it!

[The trip total was 211 species--24 of warblers, 7 of thrushes, 12 of sparrows, 8 of finches, 21 of waterfowl, 5 owls, 3 grouse, sandhill cranes with babies, 10 of flycatchers, 8 of woodpeckers--plus many more. There were no MI or MN sightings by us of such familiar "back home" species as N. Cardinal, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Loggerhead Shrike, White-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, N. Mockingbird.]

WHOOPING CRANE UPDATE

Thursday, 19 Feb 1998. *Good news on the Whooping Crane front, hot off the WWW:*

“On January 22-24, a whooping crane juvenile was confirmed present near San Bernard NWR (south of Galveston, Texas). This "chick" is not one of the 29 juveniles still at Aransas. Thus, it is the 30th juvenile produced this past summer and the 182nd Whooping Crane in the Aransas/Wood Buffalo flock. It apparently became separated from its parents in the fall migration and followed Sandhills to the upper coast, about 90 miles north of Aransas. It will return to Wood Buffalo National Park this summer and rendezvous with other Whooper Cranes, and may someday make it to Aransas.

The 30th chick has apparently left the San Bernard area since it has not been seen in the last 3 weeks. Perhaps it is already moving north with the Sandhills. Many Sandhills are already on the Platte River in Nebraska, arriving early because of the unusually mild winter. A white-plumaged Whooping Crane was confirmed present on the Platte February 15. We don't know if this bird was counted here at Aransas this winter and migrated north early (unprecedented behavior), or whether it is a bird that wintered elsewhere (perhaps west Texas), which would make it the 183rd bird in the flock. Recent census flights at Aransas have consistently been short about 5 subadults, not unusual for this time of winter as a few subadult cranes occasionally mix with the Sandhills and move out of the census area for a while. Since we don't know if one moved all the way to Nebraska, the Whooping Crane population count is still listed at 152 adults + 30 juveniles = 182.”

Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane Coordinator, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, TX. E-Mail: tom_stehn@usfw.gov

XX

Cut here and Mail to Terri Jacobson

REGISTRATION FORM--MOS SPRING MEETING--APRIL 3-5, 1998

Reservations must be received ASAP! . . . PLEASE WRITE CHECK TO: MOS & MAIL FORM WITH YOUR CHECK TO: Terri Jacobson, 1742 Kennebrew Road, Jackson, Ms 39209

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Saturday Breakfast for	Persons	\$ 5.00/ea	\$
Saturday Lunch for	Persons	\$10.00/ea	\$
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Sunday Breakfast for	Persons at	\$ 5.00/ea	\$
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4308 Shenandoah Road
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Secretary
1012 Washington Street
Corinth, MS 38834-4739

SHANNON KNIGHT
Vice-President
79 Highway 9W
Oxford, MS 38677

JANET DUBUISSON
Treasurer
22410 Glad Acres
Pass Christian, MS 39571

W. MARVIN DAVIS
Editor: MOS Newsletter
308 Lewis Lane, Oxford 38655
FAX: 232-5148
(E-mail: marvdavs@olemiss.edu)

JEROME A. JACKSON
Editor: Mississippi Kite
Dept. of Biological Sciences
Mississippi State, MS 39762
(E-mail: picus@ra.MSSTATE.edu)

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Miss. Ornithology Society
P.O. Box 515
University, MS 38677



MARY P STEVENS
5120 REDDOCH
JACKSON MS 39211

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Plans for April 1998 Spring Meeting, Pelagic Trips;
Big NAS News, Sparrow Seminar Echoes, North Country
Adventure, Winter Birding Highlights, and MORE!