

MISSISSIPPI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Founded in 1955 to promote scientific research and encourage greater appreciation of native birds.

Volume 45, Number 1

March 2000



Ictinia mississippiensis

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AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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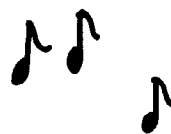
AMERICAN BIRDS: Terence Schiefer, State Editor

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAYS: Mary Stevens, MMNS

MISSISSIPPI BIRD INFORMATION

HOTLINE: 228-435-7227

ONLINE: MISSBIRD@olemiss.edu



“CALL NOTES”

BY SHANNON KNIGHT
M.O.S. PRESIDENT

The New Millennium came and went without any major problems—thank goodness! I thoroughly enjoyed participating in the Grenada Christmas Bird Count with my husband, Gene, and our good friend Fred Broerman, as I am sure many of you enjoyed your CBC's around the state.

It's always exciting to start a brand new year with an empty checklist just waiting to be filled. We headed for Tunica to start off our year with hopefully a reported Snow Bunting. We had no luck with the Bunting, but WOW! does the Delta have a fantastic array of birds, as Gene relates in his article “Delta Specialties.”

The Newsletter has a new look and format that we hope is agreeable to everyone. The typing and printing is being done by a professional printer, of course at more expense, but we feel that “we're worth it!” With the new format, we would like to involve more MOS'ers by having regional members responsible for either writing or being on the lookout for items of interest in their areas. We are still hoping that someone will come forward and take over the job as editor. Please call me at 662-236-2413 if you are interested.

We want to wish Bill Turcotte a complete recovery from his surgery shortly before Christmas. Congratulations are in order to Mr. Turcotte and David Watts on their book, BIRDS OF MISSISSIPPI. The first section of the book, “The History of Ornithology in Mississippi,”

presents fascinating and invaluable information especially to MOS'ers regarding the organization and charter members of our group. Thanks, Mr. Bill, for including M.O.S. in this monumental work. We purchased two copies “hot off the press” because we knew this would be a significant addition to our library.

Young birders are few and far between in our state, but Chris Chapman, fifteen, from Brandon is off to a great start with his birding skills. We first met Chris and his uncle, Curtis Ross, while birding at Sardis Lake. They were eager participants in Gene's Sparrow Workshop, thoroughly enjoying numerous looks at the elusive LeConte's Sparrow.

Also attending the workshop were Larry and Linda Smith from Hattiesburg. It was good to meet and open up communications with Hattiesburg birders. Larry and Linda were great and we are counting on birding with you again!

Elsie and Lawrence Croft reported at the workshop that they are about to embark on a trip to Alaska in May. How exciting! We all want to hear about it—so take good notes!

I look forward to seeing all of you at the Spring Meeting at Wall Doxey State Park. Marvin Davis, our former newsletter editor, will be honored at the banquet Saturday evening. Good birds, good field trips, good friends, good program, good food—looks like a great weekend! See you there!

1999-2000 Christmas Bird Count Highlights

The following are highlights of CBC's across the state. Thanks to compilers for reporting on their counts. We did not receive highlights from Jackson Co., Noxubee NWR, S. Hancock Co., and S. Washington Co.

ARKABUTLA (Rob Peeples, compiler) 27 Dec.; clear, 28-57 degrees; SW wind 0-15 mph; 11 observers in 4 parties; 95 species; 28,448 individuals.

Highlights: Blue-headed Vireo, A. White Pelican (300+), Greater White-fronted Goose (5000+), Bald Eagle 6 (5 adults, 1 imm.), Chipping Sparrow (154), Purple Finch (37), and Pine Siskin (8).

CHURCH HILL (Genevieve Tharp, compiler) 20 Dec.; foggy in AM, cloudy to late PM, drizzle; 45-51 degrees; 1 observer; 46 species; 997 individuals.

Highlights: Wild Turkey (14) and Pileated Woodpecker (9).

SUMNER (Genevieve Tharp, compiler) 26 Dec; wind 0-10 mph west, 31-63 degrees; 2 observers in 1 party; 70 species; 36,529 individuals.

Highlights: Greater White-fronted Goose (3,175), Grasshopper Sparrow (1), Western Meadowlark (1), Least Sandpiper (2), unidentified peep species (70+).

MOON LAKE (Carolyn Bullock, compiler) 23 Dec.; clear, light wind, 32-56 degrees; 4 observers; 84 species; 9,656 individuals.

Highest number of species since 1982.

JACKSON (Mary Stevens, compiler) 1 Jan.; foggy in AM, cloudy in PM; wind SW 10 mph; 106 species; 15,103 individuals.

Highlights: Canvasback (200), Merlin (1), White-breasted Nuthatch (1), King Rail (2), Common Moorhen (2), Horned Lark (3). Some record high numbers: Black Vulture (200), Hooded Merganser (2,015), Bufflehead (393), Greater White-fronted Goose (7), A. White Pelican (288). Some low numbers: Common Grackle (178), European Starling (403), Lesser Scaup (5).

TUPELO (Charlotte Icardi, compiler) 18 Dec.; 9 observers; 79 species; 4,165 individuals.

Highlights: Bald Eagle (2), American Robin (500), a large flock of Cedar Waxwings, Bonaparte's and Ring-billed Gulls, and Ring-necked Ducks.

LAUDERDALE COUNTY (Van McWhorter, compiler) 27 Dec.; cool and clear with light winds; 16 observers in the field and 1 feeder watcher; 83 species; 5,287 individuals. Highlights: Bald Eagle (pair).

SIDON (Philip Barbour, compiler) 17 Dec.; clear in AM to partly cloudy in PM; wind 5-15 mph; 34-50 degrees; 3 observers; 72 species; 17,917 individuals. Count week - Red-shouldered Hawk and Field Sparrow.

GRENADA (Marvin Davis, compiler) 22 Dec.; 21-41 degrees; clear; 12 observers in 5 parties; 112 species; 15,010 individuals; 2nd time to reach 112 species. Highlights: Grasshopper Sparrow (1-new to count), 14 species of ducks, 5 species of owls (Barn, Great Horned, Barred, Short-eared, Screech), missed Fox Sparrow for first time in 33 years.

SARDIS LAKE (Marvin Davis, compiler) 18 Dec.; fair, mild, and dry; 14 observers in 6 parties; 111 species; 2nd best ever (best 113 species); 14,925 individuals. Highlights: 4 Goose species including 1 Ross' Goose, Common Merganser (1 male), Spotted Sandpiper (2-2nd ever), Dunlin, Wild Turkey (36-high number), missed Black Vulture.

HATTIESBURG (Larry Smith, compiler) 18 Dec.; 34-45 degrees; constant rain, winds gusty; 14 observers in 5 parties plus 5 feeder watchers; 84 species; 5,542 individuals. Highlights: No owls, 11 species of waterfowl (including White-winged Scoter (1), Grasshopper Sparrow (1), and Vesper Sparrow (1).

VICKSBURG (David King, compiler) 18 Dec.; rain in AM and clear in PM; 16 observers in 7 parties plus 2 feeder watchers; 97 species; 27,758 individuals. Highlights: Black-crowned Night Heron (1 imm.-new to count), Barn Owl (new to count), White Ibis (6), Vermilion Flycatcher (male-6th time in 20 years); Red-breasted Nuthatch (count week), and Pine Siskin (count week).

EAGLE LAKE (Bruce Reid and David King, co-compilers) 16 Dec.; clear skies all day; 10 observers in 4 parties; 97 species; 20,010 individuals. Highlights: White Ibis (55), Greater Scaup (1), Dowitcher sp. (300).

DELTA SPECIALTIES

by Gene Knight

Not so many years ago certain species like Ross' Goose, Sandhill Crane, Short-eared Owl, and Western Meadowlark were rarely reported with regularity anywhere in the State of Mississippi. The last dozen years have changed all that, for the Mississippi River Delta lands have proved to be a "Honey Hole" for these "Delta Specialties." The thousands of acres of rice, soybean, and cotton stubble dotted with numerous catfish farms are the favored wintering grounds for these sought-after species. Past records certainly reflect the fact that these species have occurred in this delta region of Mississippi with just enough frequency to keep the avid birder riding the delta roads.

In Mississippi the Delta is comprised of 15 counties and runs about 250 miles North to South, from Memphis, TN, to Vicksburg, MS. At those points it is less than a mile wide and bulging to about 60 miles wide at the center. This delta land also lies within one of the country's greatest migratory paths, The Mississippi Flyway. Other species such as Snow Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, various duck species, Horned Lark, American Pipit, Lapland Longspur, and raptors often astonish you with their numbers.

Winter birdwatching in the Delta can be very trying at times due to the weather conditions. Temperatures can

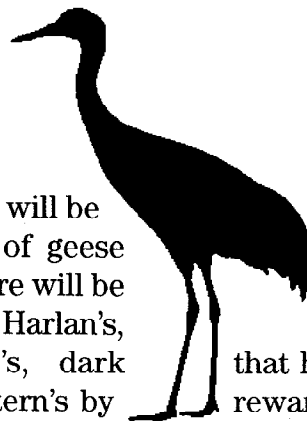
range from 10 degrees to 75 degrees with wind chills low enough to make you think you are on the tundra. It is a must for every birder to experience these magnificent creatures within their own element—great expanses that may be miles wide and miles long.

Finding Ross' Goose requires locating flocks of geese that are within good viewing distance and the patience to scan through hundreds feeding, sleeping, and flying. This goose species is relatively new to the state as the first reports were from the mid 1980's here in the Delta in Washington Co. Searching the Delta for this "New Goose" turned up Snow Goose flocks numbering in the tens of thousands. The goose populations were using flooded acreage made by Delta landowners for hunting purposes. There was so much habitat for the waterfowl that both hunter and birdwatcher alike were rewarded. These massive flocks of geese produced numbers of Ross' and Greater White-fronteds that had never been recorded in the past. Some years the duck populations in the flooded rice fields number in the hundreds of thousands.

The many catfish farms also provide very close looks at these waterfowl species and as the numbers of these increase so does the bird attraction. The ponds attract large numbers of raptors, mostly Red-tailed

Hawks—such numbers that you will be so impressed that the masses of geese you have just seen minutes before will be lost in your thoughts. Krider's, Harlan's, Western's, Albinistic, Fuerte's, dark morphs, light morphs, and Eastern's by the dozens. Great Blue Herons by the hundreds—who knew that many Great Blue Herons wintered in North Mississippi? Hundreds of Ring-billed Gulls call these catfish ponds their wintering grounds. On occasion Bonaparte's and Herring Gulls frequent the ponds. On rare occasions many Herring Gulls gather to feed on the catfish carcasses left behind by the farmers. This is when Mississippi's only record of the Slaty-backed Gull occurred and the first records of Glaucous Gull away from the Gulf Coast were reported. At times the line formations of Double-crested Cormorants have you wondering whether or not they are geese.

Western Meadowlarks have been reported as far back as 50 years ago in the Delta region. Learning their call notes and song will assist in finding them but on windy, inclement days characteristic flight and identification skills will be a must. Meandering through the Delta roads in search of meadowlarks will produce American Pipits, Horned Larks, and unprecedented numbers of Lapland



Longspurs and all the blackbird species

When locating rice fields that have knee-high stubble one can be rewarded with Sandhill Cranes and/or Short-eared Owls. Walking the stubble should flush the owls into flight only to settle down many feet away and sometimes in wide open fields. Finding Sandhill Cranes away from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi is new to the birder. In the past 20 years only a handful of records exist. Now for the past 5 years they have wintered successfully in rice fields in the Delta.

While waiting for the Short-eared Owls to come off their roost sites many Northern Harriers will choose to use the same field for the night. The Harriers will come from all directions and begin flying around looking for a place in the field to roost. Sometimes 30-40 are visible at the same time; males, females, and immatures calling and sparring. At the precise time the Harriers disappear into the field, the Short-eared Owls begin to take flight, barking and flitting side to side as they head in different directions of the Delta to feed for the night. What a treat these Delta Specialties are!



Mississippi Ornithological Society



Happy 45th Birthday!

Welcome New Members!

Jerry and Debbie Bird

Ken Bonnell

Ned Boyajian

Chris Chapman

Mary Coe

Stella Edwards

Joyce Ellis

Paul B. Hamel

Dr. and Mrs. Charles Holland

Charlotte and Steve Icardi

Holly Lovell

Nancy C. Madden

Dan and KT Mapstone

Stacy J. Peterson

Charles Pfeifer

Regional Natural Heritage Project

Curtis and Kathy Ross

Sandra Sanders

Charles G. Simpson

Larry Smith

Jeanene Tucker

Ronald Yarborough

Looking Ahead...

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INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY – On May 13 and 14, 2000 the Jackson Zoological Park and the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science will sponsor events for IMBD. Each facility will have events scheduled. Details are not finalized yet. For more information call the Museum at 601-354-7303 or the Zoo at 601-352-2590.

Jackson Audubon Society will sponsor together with St. Catherine's NWR an IMBD in mid-August for shorebird migration. Call Mary Stevens at 601-354-7303 for details.

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SPRING MIGRATION COUNT – The 2000 North American Migration Count is to be held all across the USA on Saturday, May 13. There is a format for collecting and submitting the results. If you are interested in making a county-based census on that date and are not already on the list, call Marion Schiefer, State Coordinator and Compiler at 662-324-3748.

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REMINDER: The winter seasonal records (Dec., Jan., Feb.) are due March 15 to Terry Schiefer, MOS Records Committee Secretary, P. O. Box 9775, Mississippi State, MS 39762-9775. Everyone is encouraged to submit their documentation on 3 by 5 cards with proper information: species name, state, county, locality, date (day, month, year), number seen, observers, documentation (sight record or photo, or specimen or heard only), significance and details.

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REMINDER: For those participating in the Yard List Contest (Sept. 1, 1999-Sept. 1, 2000) we hope that you are continuing to tally your list, as we are.

SPRING MEETING

APRIL 28-30, 2000

WALL DOXEY STATE PARK

LOCATION: Wall Doxey State Park, located on a beautiful spring-fed lake about 12 miles north of Oxford on MS Hwy. #7. It has 9 cabins, tent camping, a visitor center, and an easy-walking nature trail around the lake.

NOTE: State parks now require a deposit in advance on all cabins being reserved. MOS is not in a position to make deposits of such a large sum in advance, so please remember to **CALL EARLY** if you want to reserve a cabin.

ACCOMMODATIONS:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Wall Doxey State Park cabins | 662-252-4231 |
| Lodging available in nearby Oxford: | |
| Downtown Inn | 662-234-3031 |
| Comfort Inn | 662-234-6000 |
| Days Inn | 662-234-9500 |
| Holiday Inn Express | 662-236-2500 |
| Oliver-Britt House (B&B) | 662-234-8043 |
| Puddin' Place (B&B) | 662-234-1250 |

FRIDAY EVENING – APRIL 28

6:00-8:30 PM – Gene and Shannon Knight's home, 79 Hwy 9W. (From Oxford go 7 miles south on Hwy. 7 to the intersection of Hwy 7 So. and 9W. Take 9W at intersection for 3/4 mi. Driveway is on the left. Look for MOS sign. Light supper served.

7:30 PM – Slide show by MOS members

8:30 PM – Board meeting

SATURDAY – APRIL 29

7:00 AM – Field trips (meet at Wall Doxey Park parking lot near the lake)

6:30 PM – Banquet – Wall Doxey State Park Visitor Center

7:30 PM – Business Meeting

Species Tally

Speaker – Jesse Grantham, Executive Director of the
Mississippi State Office of the National Audubon
Society, Strawberry Plains, Holly Springs.

SUNDAY – APRIL 30

7:30 AM – Field Trip to Strawberry Plains Plantation, future home of
Audubon Sanctuary and Bird Conservation Center.

SPRING 2000 MEETING – REGISTRATION FORM

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

E-Mail: _____

Registration: \$5.00 per person \$ _____

Banquet: \$7.00 per person \$ _____

Total Enclosed \$ _____

I AM INTERESTED IN VISITING THE STATE AUDUBON OFFICE AND STRAWBERRY PLAINS SANCTUARY IN HOLLY SPRINGS ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 30.

Name(s) _____

Please make check payable to M.O.S. Mail check and registration form to:

Jan Dubuisson, MOS Treasurer
22410 Glad Acres
Pass Christian, MS 39571

ORDER FORM – MOS ITEMS FOR SALE — PRICES INCLUDE POSTAGE CHARGES

Send Me:

MOS T-SHIRTS (with flying Miss. Kite), SIZES S, M, L, XL, \$17.00 ea. # _____ \$ _____

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MOS FIELD CHECKLISTS OF BIRDS OF MISSISSIPPI, \$0.50 ea. # _____ \$ _____

BEN COFFEY'S MID-SOUTH BIRD NOTES, (reprint collection) \$10.00 # _____ \$ _____

BACK-ISSUES, THE MISSISSIPPI KITE JOURNAL, @ \$2.50 ea., inquire
for Years and Nos. Available.

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Mississippi Ornithological Society

Membership Form

Name(s): _____

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E-Mail: _____

Phone: _____

Renewal: _____

New Member: _____

Individual, \$15 yr.

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Family, \$25 yr.

Sustaining, \$30 yr.

Student/Senior, \$10 yr.

Life, \$300

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Dues are payable in January of each year. Check mailing label for your dues status.

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