

Volume 61, No. 1

Spring '24 Newsletter

The Spring MOS Meeting will be in Oxford, MS, May 3-5, with special guest speaker Ted Floyd, bird book author and Editor of *Birding* magazine. The meeting will be held at Camp Lake Stephens just south of Oxford. The camp boasts an 87-acre campus of forested hills with walking trails and a lake which should make for wonderful spring birding. We encourage those coming from out of town to take advantage of the seclusion, easy access for birding, and proximity to our guest speaker offered by accommodations at Camp Lake Stephens.

Accommodations

Camp Lake Stephens (CLS) offers clean, quite simple lodging in cabins. Most lodging will be in bunk-style cabins, which accommodate four or more persons, with four being optimal. We have also set aside a small number of private 2-person cabins (first come, first serve). For the bunk-style lodging, please bring your own towels, pillows, blankets & twin-sized sheets or sleeping bag, as they will not be provided. For the bunk-style cabins, we will place guests in same-sex cabins, but meeting attendees are also welcome to work out cabin sharing with each other before registration - please mention any such preferences or arrangements when registering. Camp Lake Stephens is located at 117 Lake Stephens Dr, Oxford, MS 38655. To reach it from Oxford, travel east on Hwy 6, and less than a mile past Hwy 7 turn right (south) onto CR 334. After about 3 miles heading southeast on CR 334, watch for signs for Camp Lake Stephens on the right, and turn right.

Lodging Cost

Lodging rates are \$75 per person, total, for both nights in bunk cabin accommodation, and \$200 total for a private cabin (twin beds, can accommodate 2 persons) again for both nights.

Meals

On-site meal cost (optional) is \$30 total--this includes Saturday breakfast, Saturday lunch, and Sunday breakfast. The Saturday evening banquet dinner cost is included in meeting registration fee. Friday night dinner is an optional meet-up at Circle & Square Brewery.

If you have special dietary restrictions please let us know by email: mcwulff@gmail.com

Registration

Registration fees are \$35/person for students, \$50.00/person for non-student MOS members, and \$70 for non-members (you can join MOS before the meeting to receive the member rate). Meeting registration includes the Saturday evening banquet and presentation by Ted Floyd.

To register for the meeting, and to pay for lodging and meals, visit Upcoming Meetings on the MOS website. You may also join the Mississippi Ornithological Society by visiting Membership under the About tab on our website. If you have questions about your membership status, please contact Wayne Patterson, Membership Committee Chair, at wrp6@att.net.

Schedule

Friday, May 3rd

3:00-5:00 p.m. Check-in for Cabins (CLS Office)

If you cannot arrive to check in by 5:00pm, please let us know (jason.hoeksema@gmail.com) so that we can plan for it

Saturday, May 4th

6:30-7:30 a.m. Breakfast (CLS Dining Hall)

7:30 a.m. Meet in parking lot for morning field trip to Rowan Oak (or meet group at Rowan Oak at 7:45 a.m.).

12:00 p.m. Lunch (CLS Dining Hall)

Afternoon: Free time, optional birding on grounds of CLS

6:00 p.m. Dinner, Species Tally (CLS Dining Hall)

6:45-7:45 p.m. Program (CLS Chapel),
Ted Floyd, "Thoughts on the Future of Birding & Field Ornithology (Hint: The Future Is Now)"

8:00 p.m. Potential owl and nightjar walk

Sunday, May 5th

6:30-7:30 a.m. Breakfast (CLS Dining Hall)

7:30 a.m. Meet for field trips

Location to be announced at Saturday night meeting



Guest Speaker

Ted Floyd is the Editor of *Birding* magazine, the award-winning flagship publication of the American Birding Association. He has written five bird books, including the *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (HarperCollins, 2008) and *How to Know the Birds* (National Geographic, 2019). Ted is also the author of more than 200 popular articles, technical papers, and book chapters on birds and nature. A graduate of Princeton University (A.B., 1990) and Penn State University (Ph.D., 1995), Ted has taught biology, math, and statistics to everyone from second graders to advanced graduate students.

Additional Announcements

The board proposes two changes to the MOS constitution:

1) In article IV, item 2 currently reads, “Appointed officers shall be the editors of the journal and newsletter. The editors shall be appointed by a majority vote of the board of directors.”

The proposed language is as follows: “The editors of the journal and newsletter shall also be officers of the Society, appointed by a majority vote of the Board of Directors.”

2) in Article V, item 1 currently reads: “The executive body of the society shall be known as the Board of Directors. It shall consist of the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, immediate past-president, and the editors of the journal and newsletter.”

The proposed language is as follows: “The executive body of the society shall be known as the Board of Directors. It shall consist of the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, immediate past-president, the editors of the journal and newsletter, and up to three at-large board members. The at-large board members shall be elected by a majority vote of the members present at the annual meeting, and shall serve for a period of two years. They may be reelected.”

As we discussed at the fall meeting, the idea here is to expand the team, to allow more people to participate in MOS leadership. Doing this has multiple potential benefits:

1) Recruiting new board members may be easier, since they can join without having to take on any officer duties.

2) At-large board members can learn the ropes, so that if they eventually decide to stand for a different board position, they will be able to hit the ground running. This will help with board continuity, when we have turnover.

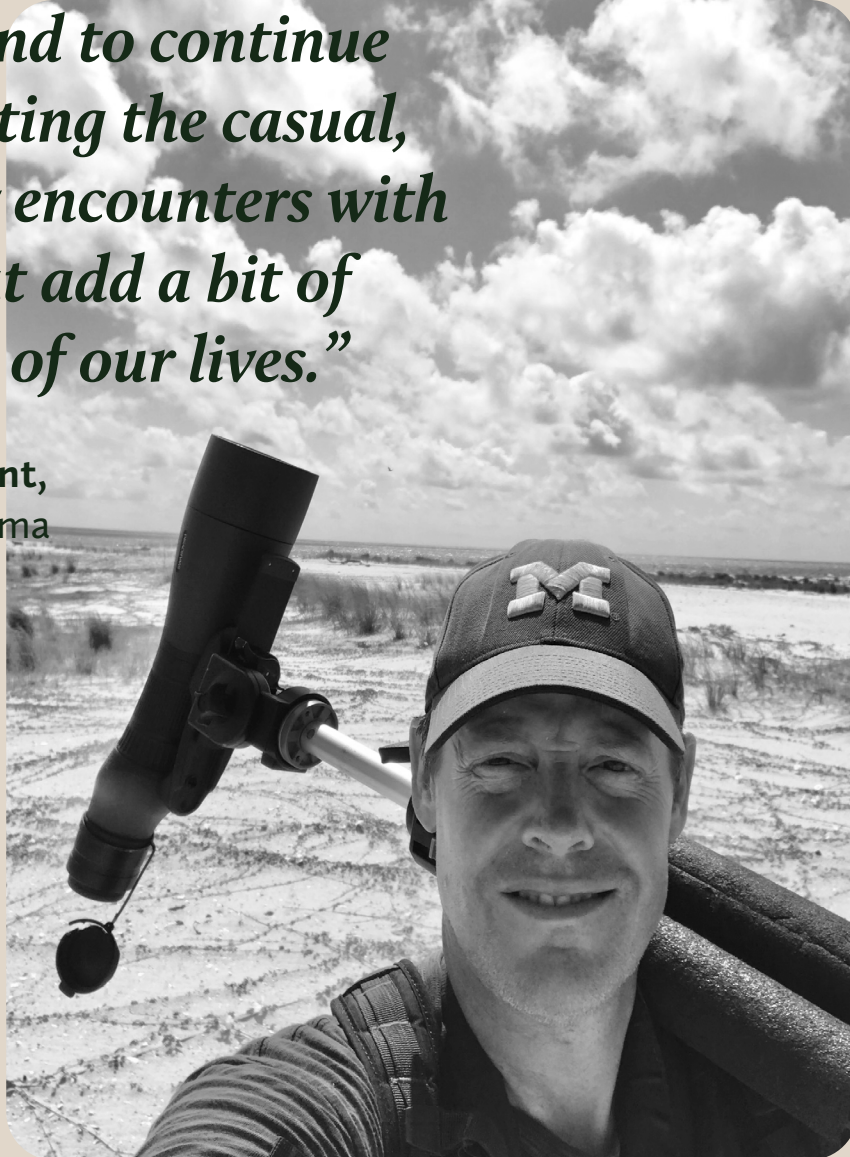
3) We will have more volunteers to help accomplish needed tasks (e.g., planning the meetings).

For all those reasons, many organizations have at-large board positions, in addition to officers.

President's Corner

“..spread this richness of birds and birding to others, and to continue appreciating the casual, everyday encounters with birds that add a bit of joy to all of our lives.”

MOS President,
Jason Hoeksema



I was walking back to my brother's house in Albuquerque last week, after spending a challenging night in the hospital with my mother. As I passed through the nearby neighborhood park, a Cooper's Hawk flew overhead and landed in a cottonwood tree, proceeding to scold me (and everyone else) with its long series of nasal and raucous "kek" calls. It was a welcome distraction from the emotional challenge my family was facing, allowing my brain to focus on something beautiful and wild for a moment.

One of the main things I love about birding is how it changes the way you experience the world. Knowing the songs and calls of birds, and recognizing different species by sight, adds a special richness to life. Whether it's a familiar Carolina Wren in the backyard on a Saturday morning, or a Lesser Goldfinch in breeding plumage serenading me during a surprise Spring Break trip to New Mexico, these encounters add a priceless layer of color, beauty, and intellectual stimulation that I can't imagine living without. Throughout an emotionally challenging ten days in Albuquerque, old friends in the bird world helped prop up the spirits: a family of Gambel's Quail scurrying across the road, a White-winged Dove cooing into the living room through the chimney, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet dropping into the backyard for a quick foraging bout, American Crows livening up the view from the hospital room. And there's always a puzzle to ponder: Are the doves and kinglets and crows in New Mexico genetically distinct from their populations in Mississippi? Will those be the only Gambel's Quail I see this year? Do Lesser Goldfinches acquire breeding plumage earlier in the spring than American Goldfinches? Was there a Cooper's Hawk nest in that park near my brother's house?

For me, this is one of the main motivations to share birding with others, to encourage learning and appreciation of birds. Life is better with an awareness of birds, and I wish it for everyone. This spring and summer, and during our MOS spring meeting, let's each do our part to spread this richness of birds and birding to others, and to continue appreciating the casual, everyday encounters with birds that add a bit of joy to all of our lives.

Jason Hoeksema

Yellow Rail Surveys on Tallahatchie National Wildlife Refuge

By Becky Rosamond, *Refuge Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey*

Tallahatchie National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1991, primarily to provide habitat for over-wintering waterfowl. The refuge covers approximately 4,200 acres and consists primarily of former agricultural lands and permanent wetlands. Approximately 1,300 acres of old fields have been reforested. The remaining acreage is managed as moist-soil wetlands or emergent wetlands for waterfowl, with approximately 600 acres maintained as old field habitat. Beginning in 2013 this old field habitat was managed through strip-disking or mowing. However, a reduction in staff resulted in a reduction in diskling and mowing, allowing trees to begin colonizing the fields. In 2022, refuge staff began managing these fields through prescribed fire.

The first burn on Tallahatchie NWR was conducted on March 4, 2022. During that burn, several “odd-looking” birds were observed flying out of fields as they were burned. These birds were not strong fliers and tended to fly low and for short distances before ducking back into the vegetation. The refuge manager was able to take several photos of one individual and it was later identified as a yellow rail. This caught my interest, and when we burned the following year (March 16, 2023) we were watching for rails. During this burn, we sighted several yellow rails in at least two separate units approximately 1 km apart.

I began to look at other records of yellow rails. Ebird listed 50 records for yellow rails in the state. Of those, only six records were non-coastal. They were reported in October (1), early November (1) and April (4). The previous refuge biologist, Fred Broerman, had several yellow rail sightings in the delta from late November–December of 1997 (not included in e-bird). One of those sightings was from Tallahatchie NWR. Diving further into the literature, it appeared that while most birds wintered along the coast, there was non-coastal wintering population in eastern Oklahoma at about the same latitude as Tallahatchie. This made me wonder if the birds we saw were just vagrants or if it was possible that we had a population of over-wintering yellow rails on the refuge. It was time to do surveys!

Yellow rails are classified as “secretive marsh birds” and as the name implies, they are difficult to survey. Generally surveys conducted on the wintering grounds consist of dragline surveys, although recent research has discovered a call they will respond to outside of the breeding season. From December 22, 2023–March 7, 2024, we conducted a total of ten dragline surveys in four different fields and on January 4, flushed and captured one yellow rail. We burned two of the surveyed fields on March 12, but did not see any yellow rails flush.



I would like to repeat these surveys again this fall/winter to see if we might detect more yellow rails. During the fall of 2023, when these birds would have been moving through the area, we were in a major drought with little to no water in the fields. Although yellow rails prefer drier sites than many other rail species, these fields were completely dry until late November. I’d also like to incorporate playback surveys to see if we might be able to get detections that way.

I would like to thank everyone that assisted with rail surveys this year. This work would not have happened without the support of volunteers!

If you are interested in participating in future surveys, please email me at becky_rosamond@fws.gov.

Tallahatchie National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 570 National Wildlife Refuges. It provides opportunities for wildlife observation (bird-watching), hiking, hunting, and fishing. The area north of Hwy 8 is closed to public use, but can be accessed through a gravel county road, and contains a viewing tower with boardwalk. For additional information, please visit our website at <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/tallahatchie/about-us>.



Iceland Gull (Thayer's)

Photo Credit: Andy Bell

October - March

Birds Around the State

By Cullen Brown

The following list takes into account review, rare, and uncommon species reported in Mississippi between October 2023 and March 2024. The list was generated through eBird data and user submissions through Missbird. A list of review and other notable species is available on missbird.org. If I omitted an observation, please feel free to email me, and I will add it to our next newsletter.

Geese, Swans, and Ducks

Trumpeter Swan (Ca): a single Tundra Swan was reported at Columbus Lake this past winter, with records in both Lowndes and Clay counties

Cinnamon Teal (Ca): a single Cinnamon Teal was also reported at Columbus Lake in February, with records again emerging from both Lowndes and Clay counties

American Black Duck (R): multiple records of American Black Duck were reported across the state this winter, with reports from Lowndes, Quitman, and Panola counties

White-winged Scoter (RW): this scoter was reported along the coast this winter, with well-documented birds in Jackson and Harrison counties

Black Scoter (RW): this species was documented along the coast as well, with several records in Harrison and Jackson counties

Surf Scoter (RW): in addition to Black Scoter and White-winged Scoter, a pair of Surf Scoters were reported inland in Sunflower County, where they are rare

Long-tailed Duck (RW): this species was well-represented this winter, with reports from Harrison, Forrest, Madison, and Grenada counties

Ross's Goose (UW): coastal records, which are notable for this species, emerged from Hancock and Jackson counties

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (UP): records of this species were abundant away from the coast and the delta (where they are expected), with reports from Forrest, Hinds, Madison, Noxubee, and Oktibbeha counties

Flamingos

American Flamingo (A): a single American Flamingo was reported near the Grand Bay NWR in Jackson County in November

Grebes

Red-necked Grebe (Ca): a single Red-necked Grebe was documented at Columbus Lake (the place to be for waterfowl this year!) in Lowndes County

Pigeons and Doves

Inca Dove (LUp): numerous reports of this species emerged from the following counties: Adams, Pike, Forrest, Jones, Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson

Common Ground Dove (GFp;IA): inland records for this species were documented, with reports from Pearl River, George, Forrest, Lamar, and Washington counties

White-winged Dove (GCp;IUUp): inland records of this species were abundant, with reports from Coahoma, Washington, Adams, Jefferson Davis, Jones, Forrest, and George counties

Cuckoos and Anis

Groove-billed Ani (GRt; IA): it was a decent fall for Groove-billed Anis, with confirmed birds in Harrison County and Jackson County

Hummingbirds

Black-chinned Hummingbird (RW): inland records for this species emerged from the following counties: Lowndes and Hinds

Rufous Hummingbird (RW): inland records for this hummingbird species were moderate this season, with banded birds in Lowndes, Rankin, Jones, and Forrest counties

Rails, Limpkins, and Cranes

Limpkin (A): Limpkin records continued to be abundant this past season, with a handful of Christmas Bird Counts documenting this species for the first time. Birds were confirmed in the following counties: Marshall, Coahoma, Tallahatchie, Noxubee, Clay, Oktibbeha, Yazoo, Hinds, Rankin, Madison, Adams, Jasper, Wayne, Jones, Forrest, Perry, Marion, George, Jackson, Harrison, Hancock, and Pearl River

Yellow Rail (RW): a single Yellow Rail was captured during a survey for this species in Tallahatchie County. See Becky Rosamond's write-up for further details!

King Rail (UP): inland records for this enigmatic species emerged in from a couple of counties adjacent to the Pearl River—namely, Madison and Rankin

Purple Gallinule (Us): inland records for this species arrived from this species' strongholds in Noxubee, Oktibbeha, and Madison counties

Virginia Rail (GUw; IUtRw): winter records for this species arrived from the following counties away from the delta and coast: Madison, Rankin, and Marshall

Sora (GFw; IUtRw): a handful of records for this species were documented outside of the delta and coast. Confirmed records came from Madison, Rankin, and Marshall

Common Gallinule (CP): in addition to other notable records for rails outside of the delta and coast, Common Gallinule records emerged from Oktibbeha, Noxubee, Madison, and Rankin counties

Rails, Limpkins, and Cranes Cont.

Sandhill Crane (GRp; IUw): this species was documented away from the coast and delta in the following counties: Madison, Noxubee, Alcorn, Tippah

Shorebirds

American Avocet (GUp; IFt): notable records for this species emerged away from the delta and coast from the following counties: Madison, Rankin, Lowndes, and Oktibbeha

Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers

Iceland Gull (Ca): an Iceland Gull (Thayer's) was well documented on the Ross Barnett Reservoir in Madison County

Lesser Black-Backed Gull (R): there were a modest amount of records for this species in Tate, DeSoto, Panola, Lowndes, Madison, Harrison, and Jackson counties

Common Tern (Gus; IRT): this species was confirmed in the following counties: Jackson and Harrison

Laughing Gull (GCp; IR): there were a couple of records of this common coastal species inland in Lamar, Forrest, and Madison counties

Loons

Red-throated Loon (Rw; GCa): a single bird was documented on the Ross Barnett Reservoir in Madison County

Pacific Loon (LRw; GA): also on the Ross Barnett Reservoir in Madison County

Storks

Wood Stork (LCs): records for this species away from the coast and delta arrived from George (November), Marion (October), and Hinds (October) counties

Cormorants

Neotropic Cormorant (LFp): early spring records of this species have emerged from Warren County and Yazoo County. Other records arrived from Sunflower, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties

Bitterns and Herons

American Bittern (GUw; IAsUt): inland records for this species arrived from Madison, Noxubee, Quitman, Lafayette, and Tishomingo counties

Ibises and Spoonbills

Roseate Spoonbill (LFs): a single fall record arrived away from the coast and delta from Covington County (October)

Kites, Eagles, and Hawks

Swallow-tailed Kite (Us): early spring inland records have arrived from Adams, Amite, George, and Madison counties

Golden Eagle (Ca): it was a good season for Golden Eagles, with records submitted from Quitman, Tallahatchie, Holmes, and Noxubee

Typical Owls

Short-eared Owl (Uw): a moderate number of counties, including Leflore, Sunflower, Lowndes, Tallahatchie, Panola, and Tunica documented Short-eared Owl this winter

Tyrant Flycatchers

Say's Phoebe (A): Noxubee, Leflore, Bolivar, and Tallahatchie counties all had well-documented individual birds

Ash-throated Flycatcher (R): this species was reported in the southern portion of the state, with reports from the following counties: Forrest, Harrison, and Jackson

Western Kingbird (LsRt): this species was well represented, especially along the coast, with single and multiple birds reported in the following counties: Jackson, Hancock, Harrison, Warren, and Oktibbeha

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (AsRt): records of this species arrived from Issaquena, Warren, Yazoo, Forrest, Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson counties

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (Ut): this tricky species was recorded in Jackson County

Least Flycatcher (Ut): records for this empid arrived from Madison, Forrest, Harrison, and Jackson counties

Vermilion Flycatcher (Rw): a number of records for this species arrived from across the state and in the following counties: Jackson, Hancock, Covington, and Issaquena



Golden Eagle

Munias

Scaly-breasted Munia (Provisional): this provisional species is still being documented along the coast (Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson counties) and now in one inland county (Jones County) as well

New World Sparrows

Grasshopper Sparrow (GRw; ILRs): a couple of records for this species arrived from Jackson County and Madison County

Lark Sparrow (LRs): a handful of late-fall records arrived from Jackson County in October and November

Clay-colored Sparrow (R): this species was documented in Harrison County (November) and Madison (November)

Lincoln's Sparrow (UtRw): this species was well documented this season across the state, with confirmed birds in Jackson, Harrison, Forrest, Jefferson Davis, Warren, Rankin, Madison, Washington, Noxubee, Oktibbeha, Tallahatchie, Quitman, and Lafayette counties

Henslow's Sparrow (Rw): inland records of this species were decently represented this season, with confirmed reports from Forrest, Madison, and Warren counties

Blackbirds and Allies

Bullock's Oriole (A): a single record emerged from the Vicksburg Military Park in Warren County in November

Wood Warblers

Black-throated Blue Warbler (Ca): a well-documented individual was recorded in Harrison County in November



Wood Warblers Cont.

Golden-winged Warbler (Ut): this declining species was documented in the fall in the following counties: Forrest and Oktibbeha

Nashville Warbler (Ut): this species was well-represented with confirmed birds in Lafayette, Yalobusha, Sunflower, Oktibbeha, Choctaw, Madison, Rankin, Forrest, and Harrison counties

Wilson's Warbler (Ut): a handful of reports for this species arrived from the coastal counties (Jackson, Harrison, and Hancock) and one inland county (Forrest)

Grosbeaks and Allies

Western Tanager (A): this species was reported in two counties, with one particularly well-documented bird in Lafayette County and a more short-term sighting in Harrison County

Black-headed Grosbeak (A): a handful of records with photographic documentation arrived from Harrison County

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|---|----------------------|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Subscribing, Libraries | <i>\$15 per year</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | <i>\$25 per year</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <i>\$35 per year</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining | <i>\$50 per year</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life | <i>\$350 total</i> |

Dues

Annual dues are payable in January of each year. Please send a check through the mail to the address below or pay online at www.missbird.org/membership-2.

Wayne Patterson, MOS Treasurer
98 Hunter's Hollow
Columbus, MS 39705

ATTN MOS MEMBERS!

In order to cut down on printing and mailing costs of the MOS Newsletter and the Mississippi Kite, we are asking any of you who would be willing to receive your copy by email to please contact Cullen Brown at brown2cu@gmail.com.