

central southern



Robert D. Purrington

Department of Physics
Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118
(danny@tulane.edu)

The dominant feature of the millennium's final summer was the sustained and widespread drought, which reached record or near-record proportions in some areas. Rainfall was near normal in June, but following record-low precipitation in April and May, July and August were almost without rain. By the end of the period, New Orleans was nearly 30 inches below normal! It is to be lamented that, absent detailed studies of reproductive success in landbird populations, one can only speculate about the effects of the dry weather on breeding. Its impact on shorebird habitat is perhaps less obscure, although low water levels can, depending on local factors, decrease or increase the extent of mudflats in the marsh. Several huge concentrations of waders in south-central Louisiana may have been a product of generally low water levels in the swamps and marshes.

If the lack of tropical weather contributed to dry conditions, the absence of storm tides evidently resulted in successful nesting of the colonial breeding birds on the barrier islands along the Louisiana, a

suspicion largely confirmed by at least three trips that were made to the Chandeleurs in June and July. The trans-gulf migration studies continued through the summer, with a single platform (GC18) manned. Most of the records therefrom were of seabirds, but there were a few interesting landbirds as well.

Abbreviations: Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), Green Canyon 18 (GC18); Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC), Oktibbeha Audubon Society (OAS).

SHEARWATERS THROUGH WATERFOWL

A Cory's Shearwater seen about 50 mi S. off S. Pass of the Mississippi R. 12 Jul (PC, SWC, DLD et al.) was perhaps the first July record for Louisiana, although the species may, indeed, be regular. A month earlier, on 12 Jun, at least a dozen Band-rumped Storm-Petrels were encountered, mostly 30–40 mi sse. of S. Pass (DLD, SWC et al.); on 12 Jul two were noted, also 30–40 mi off S. Pass. (DLD, SWC et al.). A total of 18 Wilson's Storm-Petrels was recorded on the two trips. Although not yet officially accepted by the LBRC, it is evident that Band-rumped Storm-Petrel is quite regular over very deep water (usually >1000 m) off the mouth of the Mississippi R. in summer,

with numbers at least approaching those of Wilson's Storm-Petrel. Although American White Pelicans linger along the coast in summer, they are usually absent inland, so reports of single individuals in n. Mississippi in *Noxubee* 15 Jun (Dri, TS, the first summer record there) and in *Madison* 25 Jun (TS, MS) were unusual. Anhingas were notably conspicuous at Noxubee N.W.R., MS, from late spring through the end of the period, peaking at 12 (including adults feeding young) 8 Jul (BL). The 13 reports of Least Bitterns, dominated by 12 records of at least 16 individuals from coastal *Jackson*, MS (most reported by Delmas), may reflect diligence in reporting rather than abundance of this seemingly declining species. A large heron roost in *St. Martin*, LA, 18 Jul included 1000+ Great Egrets and 4600 Snowy Egrets (BF, GG, SS, MCo). In all 13,163 waders were tallied (see below) at this spot near Catahoula, LA. A huge concentration of 2000 Great Egrets in *Lonoke* 29 Jul was the largest ever for Arkansas (KN, LDN). The count of 35,545 Cattle Egrets at Noxubee N.W.R., MS, 29 Jul (MC, TS, O.A.S.), while impressive, was actually similar to counts at this Bluff Lake location in the recent past. The 310 Yellow-crowned Night-Herons in the *St. Martin*, LA, roost 18 Jul (BF, GG, MCo, SS) represented a high concentration of a not especially gregarious species, but was dwarfed by the count of 4040 White Ibises there. Up to 33 young were produced in a colony on Bluff L., *Noxubee*, MS, representing the first area nesting of the species (TS, MC, m.ob.).

Wood Storks were present in unprecedented numbers in central and southwest Louisiana, and while they arrived early in Alabama—17–18 Jun in *Lauderdale* (AM, SH, DH)—numbers in that state were not unusual. However, almost 7000 were reported from Louisiana, with 4300 of those were in one grand concentration in *Vermilion*, LA, 29 Jul (MM, GS, PW); another 2300 were in *St. Martin* (BF, GG, SS, MCo). Elsewhere, up to 122 were seen 15 Jun+ at Noxubee N.W.R. (JV, BD, TS, MC, m.ob.), and 39, all first-year birds, were in *Bradley*, AR, 18 Jun (JC). One in *Iberville* 28 May (SF, RSe) was early.

One never knows what to make of sightings of waterfowl lingering into the summer; many, obviously, are cripples. Some, however, are healthy, and perhaps even breeding, e.g., Blue-winged Teal in *Vermilion*, LA, 9 Jul (JK, KF). There were four reports of Northern Shovelers in *Vermilion* and *Cameron*, LA (JK, CF, DR,

KF), and records of single Northern Pintails from *Desha*, AR, 11 Jun (MP, HP, DIH, DnH) and *Vermilion*, LA, 9 Jul (JK, KF). Two Surf Scoters in *Hancock*, MS, 17 Jul (BS, *fide* SJP) were remarkable, as was a male Black Scoter at Ft. Morgan 9 Jun (BL, LF) for a 2nd summer record from Alabama. There were three records of Ruddy Duck, consisting of a surprising 7 birds in *Clark*, AR (DIH), 5 in *Vermilion*, LA, 9 Jul (JK, KF), and a single female in *Jackson*, LA, 22 Jul (JB, JM). Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, which apparently continue to spread away from sw. Louisiana, were included in six reports from five parishes. Five of the observations were of pairs, the most interesting being that of a pair with 9 young at Ama, *St. Charles*, 29 Jul (GM) near where there have been sightings for several years. Although Mottled Ducks are quite rare in Arkansas and do not breed north of central Louisiana, a pair was found in *Chicot* 11 Jun (DnH, DIH, MP, HP) and another was at Bald Knob N.W.R. 4 Jul (KN, LDN).

RAPTORS THROUGH RAILS

While Ospreys breed regularly in coastal Alabama and Mississippi (and inland as well), they are rare elsewhere in the Region in summer. This year an active nest in Faulkner, AR, fledged one young (SC, Jsh, DS), while 2 young fledged from a nest near Venice, LA, and one adult was seen in Baton Rouge, LA, 27 Jul (JK).

Jennifer Coulson's aerial survey of Swallow-tailed Kite roosts in the Pearl R. basin (LA and MS) yielded a high count of 149 individuals 27 Jul (JOC, PS, BFa), and 10–12 were seen from the W. Atchafalaya basin levee 30 Jul (BF, MkS, BM). White-tailed Kites continued to breed in the vicinity of Holly Beach, LA, as evidenced by 3 juveniles near a nest site 3 Jun (PW, CS, MM). A count of 100+ Mississippi Kites in the w. "Black Belt" area 29 Jul (GJH, m.ob.) represented an unprecedented number for inland Alabama. Bald Eagles nested at Bald Knob N.W.R., AR, producing young and staying through 3 Jun (KN, LDN, BA), and in *Shelby*, TN, 4 Jun–10 Jul (OKM, MGW). A pair was present in *Chilton*, AL, 18 Jun (LJ, DTM, et al), and a sub-adult was at Noxubee N.W.R., MS, 27 Jun–7 Jul (TS, Dri, AD). Northern Harriers were seen in *Lake* and *Dyer*, TN, throughout the season (JRW), an unprecedented event that suggested nesting. There were two reports of nesting Sharp-shinned Hawks from *Pope*, AR, 27 Apr–10 Jul (L. Anderson), involving two nests, and a single pair 9 Jun (RG, JA), as well as a nest in Memphis 23 Jun (MaH), established the first confirmed breeding in w. Tennessee. Four records of single Cooper's Hawks from Louisiana suggested nesting: 1 Jun in *Iberville* (JOC, CR), 11 Jun in *St. Tammany* (JOC, TDC), 25 Jun in *Orleans* (PW, MM, GP), and 16 Jul in *St. Bernard* (TDC); however, a nest that produced 4 young in residential New Orleans

during late June (JS) provided the most dramatic evidence of the expansion of the breeding range of this species into se Louisiana. Nesting was also confirmed in w. Tennessee, when adults with young were found in Memphis 12 Jun (NPM, SNM). Two in *White*, AR, 3 Jun and three Jul records from *Cleburne* and *White* were also of interest (KN, LDN).

Eleven King Rails in *Lowndes* 8 Jun (TAP), including a bird on a nest, represented a maximum count for inland Alabama. Purple Gallinules nested in n Mississippi at Noxubee N.W.R., where 4 adults produced 6 young (TS, m.ob.), and in *Madison*, MS, where 7 adults hatched 6 young (TS, MS); at Cameron Prairie N.W.R., LA, there were a total of 76, including downy young, on 1 Jul (JK, DR, KF). Common Moorhens also bred in *Noxubee* and *Madison*, MS, with 6 young present at the latter location 25 Jun (TS, MS).

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH TERNS

The 40+ reports of migrant shorebirds included the usual non-breeding lingerers along the coast. Among more interesting records was a Snowy Plover in *Cameron* 22 Jul (JK, DR, CF) in an area where they have bred recently; southbound Piping Plovers in *Shelby*, TN, 5 Jul (MT, DM, JRW), *Lonoke*, AR, 11 Jul (BB), and *Prairie*, AR, 18 Jul (KN, LDN); early (if southbound migrants) Lesser Yellowlegs 21 & 28 Jun in *Benton*, AR (MML), totaling 14 birds; a very early Spotted Sandpiper in *Benton* 28 Jun (MML), the first Jun record for Arkansas in at least 14 years; a Whimbrel in *Cameron*, LA, 1 Jul (JK, DR, KF); Long-billed Curlews 3 Jun (MM, CS, PW, 2 birds) and 1 Jul (JK, DR, KF, CF, 3 birds) in *Cameron*, plus another there 22 Jul; 8 Marbled Godwits, the first ever in Jun for Arkansas and the largest concentration at one time, in *Benton* 21 Jun (MML); and single early Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers in *Benton* 17 & 21 Jun, respectively (MML). A concentration of 1350 Stilt Sandpipers in a single field in *Vermilion*, LA, 29 Jul (MM, PW, GS) might attest to general drought conditions. The following "out-of-season" shorebirds were encountered on the trip to Breton, Gosier, and Curlew Islands 2 Jul (DM, RDP, PW): 18 Black-bellied Plovers, 20 Semipalmated Plovers, one Greater Yellowlegs, 3 Long-billed Curlews, 7 Marbled Godwits, 3 Ruddy Turnstones, 120 Red Knots, 42 Sanderlings, 12 Western Sandpipers, 3 Least Sandpipers, and 5 Short-billed Dowitchers (RDP, DM, PW)



Perhaps offering hope for the species' future, Wood Storks appeared in unprecedented numbers in Louisiana, including a staggering concentration of 4300 birds in Vermilion Parish 29 Jul 2000, a few hundred of which appear in this image. Photograph by Gwen Smalley.

Ten American Oystercatchers, including two young, were noted from Breton to Curlew Islands 2 Jul (RDP, PW, DM). Large numbers of Black-necked Stilts were reported from *Vermilion*, LA, in Jul, the maximum count being an impressive 2800 29 Jul (PW, MM, GS).

A trip to the beaches of *Cameron*, LA, yielded three records of Pomarine Jaeger (2 adults, 1 immature), all onshore 3–4 Jun (PW, MM, CS). The same observers counted 600 Common Terns on *Cameron* beaches 3 Jun, but the highlight of the trip was an adult **Arctic Tern** on Rutherford Beach 4 Jun, about the 6th for Louisiana (ph.*). An adult Black Tern in *Oktibbeha*, MS, 27 Jun (TS) was almost in the middle of a 25-day period for which there are no local records, thus, it was either the latest or the earliest ever by nearly two weeks. The rooftop Gull-billed Tern colony at Clearview Shopping Center in Metairie, LA, continued to thrive. Numbers peaked at over 360 adults in mid-May; by early Jun 270 adults had produced over 120 young, or an average of about one chick per nest (RDP). A group of 80 Least Terns in *Lonoke*, AR, 29 Jul (KN, LDN) was a large number for a location away from nesting areas. A Sooty Tern in *Harrison*, MS, 29–30 Jul (BD, *vide* SP) was unexpected onshore in the absence of any tropical weather.

DOVES THROUGH FLYCATCHERS

Highlighting their continued vigorous expansion throughout the Region were 14 Eurasian Collared-Doves on a BBS route in *Noxubee*, MS, 4 Jun (TS), one in *Chicot*, AR, 11 Jun (DIH, DnH), 9 in Jonesboro, AR, 23 Jul (HD), and several in W. Tennessee in Jun and Jul, which established the first nesting for *Lake* (WGC, MAG, KL, JRW, et al). The Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has declared a season on the species to coincide with that of Mourning Dove, but with no bag limit. A White-winged Dove in *Shelby* 25–27 Jun (TF, KM, ph. JRW) represented the first documented record for Tennessee; a pair that summered in Gulfport, MS, 22 Jul+ (NM) raised the possibility of nesting. An Inca Dove was in Conway, AR, 21 Jul (DDH, MA), while 2 pairs of Common Ground-Doves fledged at least one young in *Chilton*, AL, in Jun (RS, MBS) and another was seen in *Greene*, MS, 2 Jul (SJP). A Black-billed Cuckoo nest in *Lake*, TN, throughout the season (ph. JRW, MAG, KL) was the first for that county and the first for w. Tennessee in 50 years. A nighthawk in New Orleans' Audubon Park 22–25 Jun (PW, m.ob.) was thought

SA Following the devastation by Hurricane *Georges* in 1998, Curlew and other nearby islands in Louisiana's Chandeleur chain of barrier islands have accreted substantially, so that sizeable tern colonies have been reestablished, although numbers are well below historical highs. Several Kelp Gulls or Kelp x Herring Gull hybrids were seen on Curlew, S. Gosier, and N. Breton Islands 2 Jul (RDP, DM, PW), with possibly 1–2 pure adult Kelps and at least 14 hybrids of various descriptions, including 3 chicks. Earlier, Cardiff and Dittmann had 20 large gulls, at least 7 dark-mantled, but no pure Kelps. The species, known to breed on the Chandeleurs since 1989, has now been added to the Louisiana list by the LBRC. However, observers should not minimize the problem of distinguishing dark-mantled Kelp x Herring hybrids from pure Kelps, especially as the birds disperse along the coast in winter. Approximately 13,000 Royal and Sandwich Terns were counted on Curlew I. and S. Gosier Is. 2 Jul (DM, RDP, PW), and there were 14 adult Gull-billed Terns, at least a dozen Common Terns, and on Curlew, 36 Sooty Terns, mostly on eggs but with a few hatchlings. Over 2000 Black Skimmers were noted, mostly on S. Breton I.

by many to be an **Antillean Nighthawk**, the 2nd for Louisiana if accepted. Recorded calls have been sent to experts for clarification. An adult male Buff-bellied Hummingbird that appeared in Laplace, LA, 23 Jul (SN, NLN, RS, LB, MO) was not only extremely early but had been banded as an adult 19 Feb 1993, and hence was at least 9 years old. According to Newfield this individual is the oldest of the species ever recorded.

In recent years there have been several records of Tropical/Couch's Kingbirds in s. Louisiana, mostly in spring or summer and generally silent. This pattern is notably different from the fall vagrancy in other western flycatchers. This summer one was seen and photographed in *Vermilion* 29 Jul (PW, MM, GS), and an earlier one on Isles Derniers, LA, 23 May (SWC, DLD) did not find its way into the spring report. The Great Kiskadee present at Venice, LA, since April 1999 constructed a nest on the same

structure as the previous summer and remained into early September (v.o.). Nesting Western Kingbirds in *Little River*, AR, 11 Jun (JC, CM) were notable, as was a nesting pair of Gray Kingbirds in Biloxi, MS, mentioned also in the spring report. One in *Baldwin*, AL, 3 Jun (BE, et al) provided only the 2nd Alabama record away from the immediate coast. The species nested sparingly in nw. Florida, but according to Duncan it still has not repopulated areas where it bred prior to 1995 hurricanes. Up to 3 adults (2 males, 1 female) in *Lake*, TN, during the period failed in a first attempted nesting, but fledged young in a second (KL, ph. JRW, WGC, MAG); apparently there was a second nesting in *Lake* as well, during Jul, with two young (CBP, WRP, VBR, WGC).

VIREOS THROUGH CRACKLES

Two Blue-headed Vireos on a BBS in *Randolph*, AL, 4 Jun (RRR) were in an area where the species has occasionally bred. Three Horned Larks 28 Jul in *Oktibbeha*, MS, (TS), one in fresh juvenal plumage, provided confirmation of recent presumed nesting in the area. Tree Swallows in *Noxubee* and *Oktibbeha* in Jun and Jul (TS, MS), totaling at least 9 individuals, along with reported nesting in *Lowndes* (*vide* TS), add to the meager knowledge of the breeding of this species in n. Mississippi. A pair 15 Jun–14 Jul in *Lauderdale*, AL, where the species is a rare nester, apparently fledged 5 young (PDK, CDC). An adult in *Benton*, AR, 5 Jun (MML) also suggested nesting nearby. Cliff Swallows continue to expand in n. Mississippi, exemplified by 76 nests in *Oktibbeha* 28–29 Jul (TS); there were 6 new breeding sites in Alabama (GDJ). A late Veery in *St. Martin*, LA, 6 Jun molting in a new tail, was banded by Conover. A pair of Gray Catbirds raised two young in Duncan's yard in Gulf Breeze, FL, the first confirmed nesting for nw. Florida. Cedar Waxwings which nested in *Haywood*, TN, for the first time (RPF), were under observation throughout Jun, and there were up to 4 at a time from late Jun to late Jul in *Benton*, AR (Mml, WC).

The four inland reports of Yellow Warbler all came from the 20–23 Jul period, which is not considered especially early on the coast, but one in *Oktibbeha*, MS, 20 Jul (TS) was the earliest ever for that area by a week. One of the most interesting oil-platform birds for the season was an adult female Myrtle Warbler on GC18 27 Jun–1 Jul (MM), either two months late or three months early as a migrant! Another 18 Jun

at Hatchie N.W.R., TN (LAZ, VVZ), though not quite so out-of-place, nonetheless provided the 4th summer record for the state and the first for w. Tennessee. Earliest ever in fall for coastal Mississippi were a Black-and-white Warbler on Horn Is. 4 Jul (AD) and a Worm-eating Warbler in *Harrison* 27 Jul (JD). As a rare and local resident in the summer in the Ozarks, up to 4 singing male Chestnut-sided Warblers 9–25 Jun (MMI) in two separate *Newton*, AR, locations were noteworthy. Nine reports of breeding Black-throated Green Warblers were received from Arkansas, including 4 records (4 adults, 2 immatures) from *Polk* and *Montgomery* in the Ouachita Mtns (RHD) and 5 (4 adults, 4 immatures) from *Izard*, *Newton*, *Pope*, *Searcy*, and *Johnson* in Ozark N.F. (LA). With concern mounting over the status of Swainson's Warbler, we merely note the following reports from n. Mississippi and Arkansas, where the species is uncommon: three records of single birds in *Oktibbeha* and *Noxubee*, MS (TS, MS), and another individual in *Grant*, AR, 11 Jun (RHD). Donata Roome, who is studying the species in Louisiana, found 20 nests this breeding season, 13 in the Pearl R. basin. Of this total, young were fledged successfully from at least six nests, six were depredated, and one was abandoned. Latest laying date was 15–16 Jun.

Also declining is Bachman's Sparrow, of which Schiefer dutifully submitted two reports from *Noxubee* and *Chickasaw*, MS, the latter involving 2 singing males 22 Jun in "remnant Black Belt Prairie" habitat. Lark Sparrows, rarely found nesting in w. Tennessee, established the first *Lake* breeding record (JRW, WGC, KL); there were 6 reports, all implying breeding, from Alabama, where the species is "rare but increasing." Late were a single Rose-breasted Grosbeak in *Pontotoc*, MS, 4–5 Jun (MtS, DS) and a White-throated Sparrow in *Webster*, MS, 7 Jun (MS, TS). A pair of Great-tailed Grackles in *Dyer*, TN (JRW, LP), would furnish the first record for the state if accepted.

Contributors (sub-regional editors in bold-face): Mark Alderman, Bill Alexander, Leif Andersen, John Andre, Linda Beall, J. Brown, Carolyn Bullock, M. Conn (MCo), Joe Cambre, Steve Cardiff, Sharen Carter, Woody Charlton, Paul Conover, C. Dwight Cooley, Margaret Copeland, Jennifer Coulson, Glen Criswell, Brian Davis, Charley Delmas, Mike Dillon, Donna Dittmann, Bob Doe, Robert H. Doster, Jan Dubuisson, Alice Duckett, **Bob Duncan**

(nw. Florida), Helen Dunn, Andrea Dunston, Betsy Eagar, Brett Falterman (Bfa), Karen Fay, Carol Foil, Steve Folse, Bill Fontenot, Bob Ford, Laureen Freglau, Tom Fulgham, Mark Greene, G. Guiard, Roger Gunter, Dana Hamilton, Stan Hamilton, Greg Harber, Dolores Harrington (DIH), Don Harrington (DnH), Martha Heinemann, Mark Holleman, **Greg Jackson** (Alabama), L. Jordan, Paul D. Kittle, **Joe Kleiman** (Louisiana), Rick Knight, Buddy Laird, Ken Leggett, Bob Leier, Nancy Madden, Don Manning, Knox Martin, Gordon Matherne, Douglas T. McGinty, Keith McKnight, Mac McWhirter (MMc), Susan McWhirter, Charles Mills, Mike Mlodinow (MMI), Ann Miller, Brian Miller, Jud Moore, David Muth, Mac Myers, Nancy Newfield, Kenny Nichols, LaDona

Nichols, Susie Nowell, Margaret Owens, **Helen Parker** (Arkansas), **Max Parker** (Arkansas), Larry Peavler, Robert Peebles, Stacy Peterson, Tommy A. Pratt, Robert D. Purrington, Robert R. Reid, Virginia Reynolds, Dave Richardson (DRi), Christy Riehl, Dave Roark, Donata Roome, Perry Samrow, Martha Sargent, R. Sargent, S. Scarce, Marion Schiefer, **Terrence Schiefer** (Mississippi), David Schroeder, Billy Scruggs, Randy Searcy (Rse), John Sevenair, Jim Sheldes (JSh), Dolores Sheldes, Gwen Smalley, Eric Soehren, Curt Sorrells, Ron Stein, Dana Swan, Mark Swan (MkS), Martha Swan (MaS), Mike Todd, Josh Vest, **Martha Waldron** (W. Tennessee), Phillip Wallace, Don Ware, Jeff R. Wilson.



prairie provinces



Rudolf F. Koes

135 Rossmere Cres.
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2K 0G1
(rkoes@minet.gov.mb.ca)

Peter Taylor

P.O. Box 597
Pinawa, Manitoba ROE 1L0
(taylorp@granite.mb.ca)

June was cool throughout the region, ranging from extremely wet in southern Manitoba to severe drought conditions in southern Alberta. July was generally warmer, with some exceptionally hot spells

in Saskatchewan. Cold, wet weather persisted well into July on the Hudson Bay coast, where ground-nest losses were compounded by increased predation due to low lemming numbers. Wet conditions in se. Saskatchewan and s. Manitoba were a mixed blessing. Species apparently benefitting included Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, Black Tern, and Sedge Wren. There was some evidence that Yellow Rails were displaced by high water from traditional fens and marshes to more transitory wetlands. Rapid water-level changes coupled with strong winds diminished productivity for some Eared and Western Grebe colonies.